



Judit Strömpl

**The K. School.  
Residential Management  
of Troublesome Girls  
in Transition-time Estonia**

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TARTU UNIVERSITY  
PRESS

## ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

To be presented, with the permission of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Tampere, Finland for public discussion in the Auditorium A1 of the University Main Building, Kalevantie 4, Tampere, on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2002, at 12 o'clock.

Language correction by: *Aljaleena Ahonen*

Cover designing: *Aita Linnas*

ISBN 9985-56-679-3

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Tartu University Press  
Tiigi 78, 50410 Tartu  
Estonia  
Order No. 686



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout the research process and completion of this work I have been given a great deal of help and support at each stage for which I am extremely grateful.

I am grateful to two organisations that supported my work. First of all, my thanks goes to the University of Tampere, and especially the Department of Social Policy and Social Work, for making it possible to complete my postgraduate study.

I am also grateful to the Estonian Science Foundation for grant (nr. 2476), which enabled me to finance the travel between Tartu and Tampere as well as the period of data collection.

I would like to express my thanks to the K. Special Needs School for allowing me to observe their world and to learn so much from the experience. The institution's direct profit from this study may seem to be small, but profit is indirect and needs time because its impact extends through the changes of thought in the system in general. Despite the fact that we work in different posts and have different perspectives, we are working towards the same thing with the same aim, which is the welfare of Estonian children. To the K. school staff members I wish energy, health and good luck in their extremely difficult work.

Behind organisations there are always people who realise the organisation's policy and whose role in my study I appreciate very highly. I would first of all like to thank Professor Tarja Pösö who supported me with the patient faith that the research will be ready one day and without whose skilful supervision this could not have happened. I also owe a debt of gratitude to the other my teachers at the University of Tampere, particularly Professors Jorma Sipilä and Kirsi Juhila, who were kind enough to read my papers — parts of



this book and my first draft, and whose valuable comments and advice helped to me find the right direction in my work.

I am thankful to the examiners of my manuscript Dr. Amanda Coffey (Cardiff University, Wales UK) and Professor Marjo Kuroonen (University of Jyväskylä) for valuable suggestions and comments.

My special thanks goes to Assistant Professor Kris Clarke, who was not only a smart partner in discussions, a good and always helping colleague in the international seminar, but she shared her home with me during my visits to Tampere through the years of study. Without her and her family's loving care I definitely couldn't have completed my doctoral study in Finland.

The participation in the international seminar at the Department of Social Policy and Social Work that started in autumn 1996 had a decisive impact on my professional development and my research. During the fieldwork and later on when I was tormented with all kinds of doubts, the seminar always helped me find just the right idea to go on to the next step. I am grateful to all my colleagues in the seminar: Kris Clarke, Tiiu Kadajane, Johanna Korpinen, Anna Kulmala, Lin Ka, Marju Medar, Anne Matilainen, Ahmed Mohammed Jusuf, Satu Ranta-Tyrkkö, and Masaya Shimmei.

I am especially thankful to Aijaleena Ahonen for her language correction. She managed my text with extraordinary sensitivity, grasping the right sense and using precisely the right words, the correct style to relay the necessary frame of mind, conception, idea, and so on, which I tried to express in my self-studied English.

My words of thank belong also to my Estonian friends and colleagues. First of all, I want to thank Anna Markina who was always ready to listen to long talks about my troubles and doubts concerning the difficulties in my workmanship. Discussions with her and her creative criticism helped always me move along. I am thankful to Elena Jedomskihh who, as a good friend of mine and an excellent psychologist, helped me manage difficulties especially during my fieldwork period.

I am thankful to other my Estonian colleagues from the University of Tartu, Marju Selg and Anu Laas who supported me especially in the final period of my work with helping me mentally and techni-

cally cope with completing the text and who were close to me in difficult days of my working life.

Last but not least I have to thank some people whose participation in the current work was indeed indirect, but who played very important role in my personal development. I wish to express my gratitude to my parents who taught me to respect the laws, accept people according to their doings not who they are by birth or post, or status; to be caring and attentive towards others, and believe to my own eyes and not what others try to convince me to believe.

I cannot forget my first teachers at the University of Tartu, Zara G. Mints and Yuri M. Lotman, who thought me not only academic analytical thinking but also deep humanity, which they demonstrated by their own way of life.

And I warmly thank my daughters Vanda and Beata who gave me the most wonderful opportunity to love them, and care about them and who taught me that beside the law there is something much more important — namely, children's welfare.

## INTRODUCTION:

### What is This Research About?

The topic of this research is a closed educational institution in Estonia for young girls who are defined as having different kinds of problems — both making trouble and getting into trouble. In this work, I refer to the institution as the K. School. Because the K. School belongs to the national system of residential management of troubled young people, it is inevitable that this research also includes writing about the system itself. However, my research work was conducted in a historically unique and very important time in the Estonian society; the era of a profound transition. The events that are described in this work and form the basis of the research took place six years after the restoration of the independent Estonian Republic, when the Estonian state and society moved from one social, political and economic system to another. The changes had an impact on every level and aspect of the society and the lives of the Estonian people. With regard to the research at hand, the transition and the consequent changes in the society became the ultimate research topic not only through the process of describing the institution in question and the system behind it, but also concerning the research process as a whole, the development of my scientific thinking, and the development of understanding social work as a new profession in Estonia. Thus, it can be said that this work is about the changes in Estonian society and in the institution in question; how I experienced and lived through them both as a worker in the field of social work and in the research process itself.

The changes that took place in the institution reflected the desire and the will to deal with the residents differently than in the past. On the one hand, this change was tied to a new way of understanding the problems of the residents, and on the other hand, to

the desire to 'divorce' from the Soviet past, and to find a new identity for the institution. However, these are two sides of the same phenomenon.

My understanding of social work as profession, its goals, functions and role changed along with the research progress due to several ethical and procedural problems, data analysis, and especially problems with publishing the research. To solve such problems I had to look for an appropriate interpretation and theoretical basis. During this process, I developed a new kind of a scientific insight into understanding social relations. This change of approach consequently meant the adaptation of the social constructionist paradigm. Some parallels can be drawn between the changes in my scientific attitude and the changes at the institution. Both express the process of transition of Estonian society.

In the following pages I analyse how change starts first with the adoption of external notions, new terms, words, utterances, and how eventually the meaning of these transforms step-by-step. During the period of transition, the meaning of common and frequently used terms of youth management in the Soviet context, such as 'care', 'control', 'child protection', also changed among the staff in the K. School. During this process the terms received new connotations that differed from their former meaning. Certainly the same terms were in use during the Soviet context. They were used together with such term as 'freedom', 'democracy', 'human rights', but their meaning was different from the way they were used in the Western context. Later on, I attempt to dig deeper behind the usage of these kinds of terms in the social conditions of the whole transition process.

During the research process, I encountered some questions which I was unable to answer by using the approach which I had intended to use. I began the research with a qualitative participant observation approach, but found it impossible to continue in a traditional positivist way of thinking. On the one hand, I was not comfortable with positioning the staff and the residents of the institute into opposing groups, and I wasn't comfortable with my role as a controller. On the other hand, I became more and more uncertain of whether what I observed and perceived was actually 'the only true reality'. I was tormented by doubts about my way of making and



interpreting observations. Moreover, the management of the school had earlier accused me of not being able to see and understand things as they 'really were'. How things *really* are? This was expressly the question which stopped me from publishing anything about my research for long time. Especially in my status as an outsider, a representative of another culture<sup>1</sup>, I felt powerless, as if I did not have the right to understand the reality in my own way. The social constructionist way of thinking has given me more confidence in this regard.

On all of the above-mentioned levels, the changes were strongly linked to adopting new terms or using old terms in a new way and with a new meaning. The process of paradigm change in the field of child protection began when Estonia ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on 20 November 1991. The change first became apparent in the usage of a new type of terminology and a new way of using old terms. The meanings of terms differed depending on who used them, at what time and in what context; in other words, it was the meanings of words that went through change. Naturally, language is only one part of social reality, but a very important one. Language has a substantial role in the construction of social reality, but as I attempt to demonstrate later, using the 'right' words does not always indicate positive changes in reality. However, using a constructive vocabulary can be a good starting point for positive changes in human activities and behaviour. People's everyday experiences make corrections in the use of language.

According to Bakhtin (1999), every era and every social circle has their so-called authoritative utterances, that is, verbally expressed leading ideas, basic tasks, and slogans through which people consciously consolidate. The utterances and slogans of that people share also indicate which group they wish to belong to, and which current

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<sup>1</sup> I am Hungarian by origin; born in Trans-Carpatia (Ukraine). I belong to that part of the Hungarian population that was left out of the Hungarian state after the First and the Second World Wars. Despite the fact that I have never lived in Hungary — or perhaps particularly for this reason — I have kept a strong national identity as a Hungarian. I came to Estonia in 1971 to study at the University of Tartu, and have lived in Estonia ever since.

ideas that group is tied to. I attempt to analyse those basic verbalised ideas which were typical of the transition time in Estonian residential care of troublesome young people, and try to find interpretations for them: how come those certain ideas came to prevail and how were they understood by the actors of residential management.

Some terms became especially popular in the mid-1990s. A good example is the often-heard term 'child-centred', as in 'child-centred approach' or 'child-centred management'. I attempt to demonstrate how this concept was used in dealing with the young women in the K. School, how the staff members in different positions explained the meaning of child-centredness, and how even the relatively brief period of my fieldwork changed the staff's attitudes in concern of the usage of the concept.

As I analysed the research data produced at the institution during the fieldwork, I recognised the importance of definition. When people interact, they become conscious of the meanings of words or terms. During the interactive process they 'work' with these meanings and changes in them take place. On the one hand, concepts are changing during this process, and on the other hand, it produces changes in people's activity and behaviour.

Before I begin to describe the K. School, a closed educational institution for troubled girls, I will discuss some preliminary theoretical issues. In terms of writing style, this theoretical discussion differs from the general style of the research. This can be explained by the following circumstances: throughout the entire writing process, I had different types of readers in mind, such as an external (or Western) reader as well as an Estonian reader. The chapter on theory (1.2.3), in which I introduce my understanding of constructionist theory, is written first and foremost for the Estonian reader. Perhaps it was because this reader looking over my shoulder that I did not let my personal voice resound too much. The most problematic part of my work with regard to those Estonian scholars familiar with my work is its very personal and subjective nature.

The work at hand is divided into three parts. The first part consists of chapters 1 and 2. It gives an overview of the theoretical and methodological basis of the research, and introduces my approach to the research topic. This includes both different theoretical approaches to the problem of children's troublesome behaviour, as

well as possible pragmatic ways of finding solutions to it. There is also a brief overview of the historical development of residential care of troublesome young people in Estonia.

The second part consists of chapters 3, 4 and 5. It describes the K. School with regard to its physical space as a stage (in Goffman's understanding of this word), its actors, namely, all people who are participants in the operation of the institution, and the daily regime and other activities at the institution. This description, which also includes an attempt to analyse the institutional activity and explain how the actors in the K. School participated in it, creates the basis for the third part of the study.

The third part, chapters 6 and 7, focuses on the analysis of the rhetoric of changes, changes in rhetoric, and the contradictions that the new rhetoric includes with regard to the context of the transition time Estonia. The last chapter also includes certain general conclusions of the whole study and critical remarks on the present tendencies of development.

After the restoration of the independence in Estonia, the problem of troubled children and young people received a new and unexpected form. Many new social problems appeared in concern to children and young people which were previously unknown: school truancy, street children, child prostitution, child drug addiction, the spread of HIV/AIDS among children, and so forth. Consequently, the criminal activities of young people increased, and the minimum age of child criminal offenders dropped in the beginning of the 1990s. This development generated a strong reaction in society, which initiated discussions on the topic first of all among professionals working in the practical field, but also an academic interest to study these new phenomena began to grow in the early 1990s. The academic discourse was primarily focused on the quantitative study of the problem with the objective of finding quick solutions. This makes sense because children in trouble do not have time to wait. The scientific studies that were published in the 1990s and in the early 2000s were conducted with the traditional logical positivist approaches of sociology or other social sciences primarily through quantitative research methods. The aim of such studies in general was to find out the extent and the types of the problems of troublesome young people, and compare the results with so-called normal



children. The Estonian academic discourse on troublesome children and their residential care will be examined in more detail. However, there is reason to mention that a deep analytical study of the problem from a social constructionist point of view has thus far been lacking in Estonia. The professional discourse focuses on finding quick solutions to the problems, and the question of the social causes behind them has been left out of scientific interest as a rule.

The general objective of the study at hand is to approach the problem of the residential care of troubled young people from a new perspective. I attempt to analyse the impact of interactions and the role of interpretations and explanations in the everyday life situations of a closed institution, the official goal of which is the re-socialisation of troubled girls under the age of 17. My aim in this study is to reconstruct the everyday activities at the K. School and the effects of this on the girls, the staff, and the society in general. By doing this, I hope to add a new approach to the Estonian professional discourse on troublesome children and young people, as well as their residential care. At the same time, I would like to establish the basis for the ethnographic research method in the Estonian social scientific research, which thus far is rarely used (most ethnographic studies have been the bachelor theses of sociology students and conducted at the Department of Sociology of the University of Tartu: see Annist, Gross, Kärsti, Oidjärv). Moreover, the interest in ethnography as a social scientific method is currently growing and can be seen in emerging research.

## 1. THE STORY OF THIS RESEARCH: The Beginning and Before That

It was the sixth year after the restoration of the independence of the Estonian Republic when I started my fieldwork at the K. School in the beginning of 1997. It was the time when the initial euphoria after the emancipation from the Soviet occupation started to sober up. However, the euphoria in Estonia was quite modest. Made wary by history, Estonians managed their statehood very carefully. People expressed the feelings very prudently when the first information about the emancipation from the USSR came out. It was an expression very essentially Estonian: we will see if it really is so. This prudence did not mean, however, that people did not do anything. On the contrary, the processes of changes occurred very quickly. 1996–97 were years when the Estonian people in general started to believe that the Soviet Union was irretrievably broken and that Estonian statehood does indeed exist. This was the time when the questions of new identity in terms of both the nation and state arose. Who are we, and where do we belong? During the Soviet time it was self-evident: Estonian identity was always linked with the Soviet regime; whether in consolidation or in opposition towards it. I believe we can speak about Soviet era Estonian identity in general as an identity of opposition. However, both consolidation and opposition had the aim of survival. Many former communists justify their co-operation with the Soviet regime through the goal of gaining power to save the Estonian nation. Arnold Rüütel, the head of last Soviet government in Estonia and winner of the presidential election in September 2001, is among these people.

This was the Soviet era Estonian identity. However, in the mid-1990s it no longer worked. There is a book edited by Lauristin and Wihalemm (1997) which is of great importance in order to under-

stand the situation in Estonia at the time. Changes that took place in the society after the restoration of the independent Estonian Republic found a representational expression in the title of the book: 'Return to the Western World', which rhetorically expresses the main aspirations of the Estonian society on the whole. The title expresses the deep belief that Estonian society essentially *belongs* to the *Western* world, and that the time of the Soviet occupation was a violent deviation from the natural, normal development of the Estonian nation and can be illustrated by the story of Jonas, a picture of which — Jonas coming out of the whale — is found on the cover of the book.

Lauristin starts her discussion of the essence of the transitions with a quotation from Huntington's "The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order":

*'Spurred by modernisation, global politics is being reconfigured along cultural lines. People and countries with similar cultures are coming together. Peoples and countries with different cultures are coming apart. ...'* (Huntington 1996 in Lauristin 1997: 25)

The chapters in the book are proof of the notion that Estonia and the Estonian society belong to the Western world (see also Strömpl 2001: 167–8).

Newly independent Estonia began its reorientation with the adaptation of so-called Western attributes. In addition to the new political (party plurality), governmental (parliamentary democracy), and economic (free market) systems, there were also rapid changes in the language of international relations: English overtook Russian, which also meant that the partners of international relations changed. For instance, during the Soviet era the orientation of Estonians towards Hungarians as a Fenno-Ugrian sister nation was dominant, but in the 1990s Estonia turned her face to the North. Instead of identifying with Central Europe, Estonia began to shift in the direction of the Scandinavian nations. Justification was found in historical unity. (Piirimäe 1997: 43–72)

A process of the adaptation of typically Western (Scandinavian) attributes had begun. One of these attributes was social work as a profession. The Soviet Union and other states in the so-called Soviet camp did not recognise social work as a profession which has the



objective of dealing with and finding solutions to social problems. Social problems as such were in contradiction to the entire Soviet ideology (Simpura 1995: 11–2). People's problems could only be of a personal nature, and solved by those state organisations that the individual in question belonged to. Since everyone belonged to one or another official institution or collective — if not otherwise, at least through the registration of place of residence which was strictly mandatory — it could be the administrative authority, the Communist party organisation, or the trade union that had the responsibility to deal with people's personal problems.

Formally, the state was responsible for taking care of the old age and disability pensions, as well as families with many children and single mothers. (However, I will not discuss the quality of this state 'care'.) For disabled persons, children without parental care and elderly people there were state institutions (children's homes, elderly homes and institutions for disabled people). The Ministry of Social Welfare (1979–1991) dealt with the problems of so-called personal pensioners (people who had special merits), war veterans and war invalids. In a word, the Soviet state took care of those who needed help through its state organs, without any special system of social work. The primary form of care was institutional care for different kinds of people in need: the state established children's homes, boarding schools, homes for the aged and for people with different kinds of disabilities (on the Soviet way of care-taking see also Suni 1995: 31–2).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the old system came crashing down and left a great vacancy in its place. Simultaneously, additional new problems appeared, such as unemployment and the new types of problems with concern to children, which I mentioned in the Introduction, which required urgent attention<sup>2</sup>. At that time,

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<sup>2</sup> Two of my former students at the Pärnu college who were completing their diplomas interviewed high-level professionals (including all five former Ministers of Social Affairs) about the reasons behind establishing social work as a profession in Estonia. All of the interviewees were among the initiators of Estonian professional social work in the beginning of the 1990s. Most of them emphasised the unexpected rise of new types of social problems and the absence of any kind of a helping system after the collapse of the Soviet Union. (Arenberg & Orav 2001)

Estonia was nostalgically hopeful that the *restoration* of independence of the Estonian Republic signifies the restoration of the *former* Estonian Republic, where social work already existed (Tulva 1996: 4–10). Thus, there were some parallel reasons for establishing social work as a profession and a system.

On the one hand, the profession of social work came to existence along with the establishment of chairs of social work at the universities of Tartu and Tallinn, which signified the beginning of a higher-level education in the field, and on the other hand with the emergence of the new occupation of social workers under regional governments, later under social agencies.

The establishment or re-establishment of social work as a profession in Estonia would be an interesting and important research topic. However, the objectives of this research lie elsewhere.

### **1.1. Social Work as a New Subject of Study at the University of Tartu**

In the end of 1991, a chair of social work was established at the University of Tartu. The next year, in 1992, having the professorship opened up the possibility of studies in social work on the master's degree level for people who already had a preliminary higher university education<sup>3</sup> and wished to continue their studies in the field of social work. The master's degree programme was a two-year project. The students could participate in different theoretical and practical activities, such as attend lectures and carry out some research projects. In the first year, 12 students were accepted to the master's degree programme. The first professor to hold the chair of social work at the University of Tartu was Henn Mikkin, a psychologist by education. Most of the lecturers also had a degree in either psychology or social psychology. This explains the psychological, advisory approach to social work at the University of Tartu, and helps to understand its role and the objectives.

At the time, I was working as a language corrector at the Laboratory of the Sociology of Deviant Behaviour of the Department of

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<sup>3</sup> In the Soviet Union, university education took five years.



Sociology, University of Tartu. I had a degree in Russian philology, and it was my task to translate and correct the language of those scientific texts that were written in Russian. In the Soviet times, every doctoral dissertation had to be written in Russian. Our laboratory also published collections of articles in Russian nearly every year. During the five years I worked at the laboratory, I did not merely translate and correct the writings of scientists, but also had the opportunity to participate in carrying out research work. By the beginning of the 1990s many things were changing. Possibilities opened up to study certain issues that were prohibited before. One of these topics was suicide. I had an interest in studying the topic, and began to read books and research reports about it. I had the opportunity to get a lot of research material from Hungary, where the study of suicide was on a relatively high level for the time. An article I wrote on suicide in Estonia was published in Hungary (see Strömpl 1990). It was an overview of the statistical data I had found. However, I did not feel confident and well enough prepared to study the topic further, and when I learned about the master's degree programme in social work I saw it as my best possibility to get a professional education. I was accepted to the first year group of master's degree students in the autumn of 1992.

### **1.1.1. Why Troublesome Adolescent Girls as the Topic of Study?**

During the second year of my master's degree programme, the students had to choose a topic for their research. By that time I had understood that from my viewpoint, the most interesting and maybe the most important issue tied to the study of suicide was the study of the so-called risk groups of parasuicidents. Troublesome young people, and adolescent girls in particular, formed a special group within the risk groups. Having two teenage daughters of my own at home, and remembering the issues and problems concerning my own childhood and adolescence, my choice was quick and self-evident. At this time, I knew next to nothing of the K. Special Needs School.

Once, during a break between lectures, one of our master's degree students asked in the classroom if anyone would be interested in conducting a study on the girls of the K. School. I remember this particular moment as a very important incident in my life; it was as if the question was directly addressed to me. Later, when I asked my fellow student if he remembered being the one who gave me the impetus to study the K. School, he could not recall the incident at all.

### **1.1.2. The Master's Degree Research**

Thus, I ended up doing the research work for my master's thesis by studying the residents at the K. Special Needs School. In my research work, influenced by the previously mentioned conceptions which were tied to my studies, I looked for evidence to what the needs of the residents were by studying their family backgrounds, school careers, and the problems that led to them being sent to the reformatory school, and other such things. I used an official standardised survey questionnaire, which was developed for a Canadian study of juvenile criminal offenders within the framework of probation for compiling individual cases, "Youth level of service interview (Draft)". The questionnaire was translated and adapted to Estonian circumstances. As I now see it, my study was not so much a study of the needs of the girls, but more a study on what qualities the girls had; what they were like on the basis of their social background and the course of their lives. The reasoning about the needs was mostly based on hypotheses of my own, such as if a girl comes from an asocial and alcoholic family where she is neglected and has no opportunity to develop, what she needs is good care and an opportunity for development; if she comes from a so-called normal, socially acceptable family background but has already committed criminal offences, then the causes for her problematic behaviour should be sought in some personal failure (perhaps in some family secrets) and her needs would be best met with direct therapeutic intervention. If she is a victim of circumstances such as family violence, a jealous mother or other conflicts between the parents and the child, she simply needs protection from her own family.

The most interesting part of the work was the study of the girls' personal life histories. I also felt that some of the girls did not belong there, because the K. School residents have a quite negative reputation in Estonia as 'bad girls', to say nothing of the bad influence of a closed institution as a living place for adolescent girls. I felt it was unjust to hold girls who had committed no crime and were merely seen as potential offenders, or were simply neglected by their families, behind locks in a school that had the reputation of being a correctional institution. These interviews were the basis for compiling details about individual cases. As I studied the cases of the girls, it became obvious to me that the residents constitute at least three groups that have different needs, and consequently need to be managed in different ways (see Strömpl 1995, 1996). However, the most important questions were how the K. Special Needs School satisfied the residents' needs, what constituted the management of these girls, what work methods were used, and how the girls were actually helped. These questions were also the research results of my master's thesis. I defended my master's thesis in the summer of 1995.

### **1.1.3. Post-Graduate Studies at the University of Tampere**

In late autumn of 1995, two of us who were among the first Masters of Social Work from the University of Tartu were offered the opportunity to continue our studies on a Ph.D. level at the University of Tampere. My journey to Tampere was very stressful. First of all, there was the language that presented a great challenge to me: the studies were to take place in English. I saw my English language skills as inadequate, and in fact the very thought of receiving yet a higher level of education in a new language made me weary. I had completed my secondary education in Hungarian, my university Bachelor's Degree in Russian, and my Master's Degree in Estonian. I was not at all sure if I could cope with writing a dissertation as high as a Ph.D. in a new language that I had to learn along with the studies. Nevertheless, I saw this challenge as a big gift that fate presented me with, and how could I not receive it with open arms? This was a great opportunity to acquire new knowledge in the field of



social work from an excellent source; in a place which had a long experience in the study and teaching of social work. My first visit to Tampere was full of expectations. One of the expectations was that there are very wise teachers who will teach us very quickly what we need to know. The process of teaching as I imagined it at the time was tied with my earlier experiences: teachers just tell me what I have to do and how I should think. I expected them to know the 'truth' and share it with me, and that everything thus far hidden for my eyes would be revealed and I would soon, very soon acquire a totally new understanding of things.

There are two things that are characteristic to post-Soviet people: the first is the evident profit of what they want to get and the other is a desire to get this profit quickly. This gives an impression of people who lacked something during the Soviet era, and are in a hurry now to go get everything quickly that was unavailable before. Yet, there are processes that need time. The personal development of a human being is not comparable to straight line long-distance running. It is process of maturation; to get ready to receive and understand things. Nobody can give you anything as long as you are not ready to receive it. At the Department of Social Work at University of Tampere I felt I was accepted and taken seriously and I always found support when I needed it, but nobody played such kinds of 'teacher-pupil games' with us.

## **1.2. The Development of the Theoretical and Methodological Basis of the Study**

The theoretical and methodological development of this study has its own, perhaps unusual, story. Initially, the study was intended to be conducted as traditional positivist research based on interactionist theory of deviance (labelling theory and Erving Goffman's theory of total institutions). On the basis of these theories hypotheses were built, which during the research would be tested. The hypotheses were tied partly with the results of my master's research and were to be worded as the following: K. is a total institution; as a total institution the K. School has a negative influence on the residents; the institution creates so-called 'K.-School-kids'.

To carry out the research I chose a qualitative method and with this the process of change of the theoretical paradigm started. I felt that the positivist way of thinking is in deep contradiction to my practical operations, that is, I could not describe the situation in the institution from a positivist point of view for various reasons.

### **1.2.1. Ethnographic Participant Observation and Soviet Heritage**

Regarding participant observation I had to do things that were in contradiction with my previous values that came from the Soviet system. The most hateful demand of the Soviet ideology was to snoop around other people and report about their doings. When my children went to school (Russian) in the middle and late 1980s their teacher claimed that children look at how their classmates behave and if they noticed something bad, they should report it to the teacher. (It was a common practice in schools, at least in Russian ones.) Other teachers even set up a special book, where children were to note down the behaviour of other children. 'This is not tattle-taling. We just help those poorly behaved children to become better,' — explained the class teacher of my older daughter at the meeting with parents. The rising of 'Pavlik Morozovs' still existed in the 1980s. In our family we did not allow our children to do this. We told them that complaining is not nice and everyone should respect personal privacy of other people. It was one of the most important values in our family.

Now with concern to ethnographic research I should observe people, watch what they do and how they live, make notes, and in the end report about all of that publicly. It was not so easy to accept. I wavered between interest in the field and those memories about informing during the Soviet era. The same feeling arose later while in the field regarding censuring the residents' letters. It was extremely interesting to read them, but I felt I should not do that. Everyone has his/her right to privacy, even a child. In the beginning, I had contradictory feelings about the method which seemed to me quite close to a method of control: keep an eye on somebody — which was quite hateful to me and even the choice of a closed insti-

tution — an institution where the residents are under strict 24-hour control, where their freedom is limited. On the one hand, the principle of a closed institution with its total control and intervention in personal privacy was objectionable to me. On the other hand, I was going to do the same intervention to the operation of the institution. I felt that my study also affected others personal privacy, both staff and residents.

The most important value to me was the respect for personal freedom. It was quite logical after the Soviet system which limited that freedom. As a result of this limitation there arose distrust between people. Nobody knew what the other person had in their mind when he/she came to you. We always were afraid of so-called 'bugs' (listening devices). No wonder that people did not trust each other and everybody thought about his/her own prosperity.

I still hate any intervention into other people's lives, even when they have problems and they need such kinds of intervention. Who knows what the other person needs, what is good for him/her? In this regard I do not even like the concept of helping — how it is often expressed in an Estonian context. Somebody somewhere decides what is 'right' and 'needed' in dealing with those who require help and starts to act at his/her own discretion. Very often this type of activity in fact totally ignores person receiving the help. It is demonstration of power for whatever reason.

Why did I do it then? As I mentioned before, my understanding about the aim of social work was to realise the client's welfare through getting to know his/her needs. Those girls at the K. School were in trouble. After all the school exists and could only exist if it would be able to somehow help girls in trouble, or how could it manage with delinquent adolescent girls. I did not receive enough information about how the residents' benefit was guaranteed by the institution. I wanted to know what happens inside the K. School and how it influences the residents. I was looking for the effect of the institution on the residents and had as my aim to use knowledge that I would obtain during the study to change the operation of the school to be more effective. This sureness gave me some confidence to do this research as an ethnographic participant observation.

There was also an important detail, which made a difference between Soviet era control and reporting and my research: I, as a par-



ticipant observer, was visible to other participants of study and during the period of data producing we discussed the issues with one another.

### 1.2.2. How did I Change My Own Opinion on Ethnographic Participant Observation?

In the beginning I thought along the same lines as K. School managers: namely, that this is research during which I collect data about the operation of the institution, that is about the school' inside life. From this standpoint it was evident that I am an active kind of 'collector' and they — the staff members and residents — are the passive part of this study. On that score the relations between the researcher and subjects of study could be assessed as not quite equal. There was a very strong sense of control tied to the research. It was quite difficult to recognise this inequality in our relations in the field. I was interested in getting more information and I felt that this is *my interest* and I somehow *use* people in reaching *my aims*. (To tell the truth, my only aim was to learn what happens at the institution and to understand what is going on and why. I had no intention to benefit somehow from this knowledge. I thought that producing knowledge about residential care is only my business and the benefit from this knowledge would only be for me and maybe some other scholars.)

The managers had exactly the same opinion about my study, which was to be done with the aim of developing my own academic career. And I could not say that this aim did not exist. I even felt remorse because of my egoism: I use people to reach my own very selfish aims. In discussing the field relationships between the researcher and researched subjects, Coffey (1999: 39–40) makes points that are very similar to my experience:

*"Fieldwork relationships are at once professional and personal. ... The onus (of field relations established with professional aim) is firmly on us to initiate a working rapport and level of trust. We are locating ourselves within a particular setting. We are the ones for whom the relationships matter, in the context of our research agenda. That is not deny the meaningfulness of fieldwork relation-*

*ships for other social actors in the field. Indeed, one of the qualities and potential problems of ethnographic fieldwork is the shared and significant relationships that are often forged. But at least at the commencement of fieldwork it is up to the researcher to actively pursue these social relations. Given the possible variety of fieldwork locations, this is bound on occasion to result in attempts to establish relationships and common ground with social groups with whom we have explicitly very little in common."*

Emotionally and on the basis of personal identity, the relations in the field are more important for the ethnographer. It creates an important part of his/her biography.

The researcher is more responsible not only for field relations, but also for the information produced in the field. Every ethnographer is interested to obtain as much information as possible, but it is an ethical load for the ethnographer, which he/she should not forget, while those researched can.

Despite the guarded reception of me by the staff and especially the managers, the mid-level staff seemed to forget my role as a researcher surprisingly quickly. I had to repeat information many times about my study, but it did not help. The mid-level staff members accepted me very soon as one of them and I was surprised that when my fieldwork was finished some of my colleagues asked why would I not continue to work at the school?

Despite my warning, people told me about themselves and especially about other quite intimate details of their lives and working relations. At first I was happy: I received quite unique information, but later I understood that these rich data create a heavy ethical load. What can I do with these data? How can I publish them? Where is the border between personal privacy and social openness? Of course, I can hide the reality, nobody forces me to publish the information that I received. But can I do that? Can I keep silent what I know if it affects the residents' (and not only the residents) well-being? Initially, this understanding helped me: I decided to make available the information that has a clear impact on the residents' well being. Later, the desire not to hurt anyone grew strong. But everything was too entangled, and everything touched me personally. I could not maintain the opinion of an outsider who just re-



cords what is happening. I had deep and unpleasant feelings, which I should not feel, or so I thought then.

I was irritated with my permanent wish to blame the management and some of the staff members because of their 'skill-less' dealing with residents, and because I felt that keeping the adolescent girls in such a closed institution had much more of a negative impact on their development. I identified myself sometimes with the residents, sometimes with the staff. Both were unpleasant visions. At first I was sorry for the girls who had no normal loving family, who were in this institution in the abnormal circumstances of total institution. Later, when I learned a little bit more about the work and relations between the residents and staff, I felt sorry for the staff also who had to deal with these girls who behaved sometimes (most of time) terribly.

I was afraid to make mistakes and I tried to do something good for the residents. I also felt I could and I must help the staff members, but I did not know how. From time to time I felt that I had to be a good educator (teacher) for the girls, to help them, and I felt it quite impossible in such circumstances. I also experienced that when I did something for the girls, fulfilled their appeals, they started to demand more and more, and they used me. Other staff members warned me not to do that. I also felt a falsehood in all this 'trying to help'. I thought that if I really want to help them, I should take them with me. And I understood how unreal this thought was. I hated to recognise my powerlessness. Most of time I felt that if I protect one side, I simultaneously am standing against the other side. I think this is a typical understanding of the task of the social worker: to defend the client from dangers, which exist in the face of powerful people (for instance, bad teachers at school or dangerous parents at home). In such an approach, the social worker is always in the centre of a 'war' between two enemies that are generally the society and the client.

Soon I had a new feeling that some situations were created by other social actors, especially to put me into a difficult circumstances in which I could not cope. I felt that both the managers and the residents wanted to test me by making difficulties. I really felt myself to be like Kafka's hero. I lost trust in people.

Then I thought that my goal is not to change anything at the institution, but to observe and capture the observed with the maximum objectivity and minimum emotions. This thought raised the next doubt. How can I know that the events and activities that I see are the 'real' course of events? Moreover, the managers before accused me of not understanding the things right. Other staff members pointed out that to understand what life is like inside the school and the nature of this work, the character of resident and so forth, one should be inside for no less than three years.

I stood in front of the questions: what is social reality, how to obtain knowledge of social reality and how to express this knowledge?

From the positivist standpoint, the understanding of social reality exists objectively, that is, independent of human activity and opinion. On the contrary, human activity is determined by social reality, which is placed on human beings.

According to traditional positivists sociology, as described by Giddens (1993: 1-2) and the social science tradition of thinkers such as Durkheim (1895/1982), social reality exists as complex of social facts, objectively. Social facts are independent of human beings' opinions and these facts determine individual behaviour. In other words, individuals are subordinate to social facts, not vice versa. Because social facts exist objectively, they can be observed and should be studied through objective methods. In the case of participant observation, it meant first of all to capture the observable reality as much as it corresponds with the course of events.

My first attempt was to describe the field based on such objective study. I tried to capture the words that people used, to describe their voices, the situations, everything that I thought would be important to describe the real events. But later, in the process of analysing the data, I doubted that I could be certain that my description would be adequate and how could I prove the 'objectivity' of received picture? I thought objectivity would arise if I would keep a distance between me, my thoughts about the event, my feelings concerning other events, and the 'object'. I tried to fix everything to be as 'adequate' as possible, but it was impossible to control this adequacy. Later, in process of reading and analysing the field notes I noticed how much even the description of physical space changed during the time. In the beginning I found the village and school

building to be romantic. I was full of expectations of something interesting. I focused on the fresh air, and imagined the old time when the school building was a manor house. Later I saw more clearly how ugly it is and how ugly the other buildings around it are. If at first everything was interesting to me then later my relations with the environment were influenced by human relations and personal conditions. The next peak arrived when I noticed that I started not to care about them at all.

The next difficulty was tied to blaming people in process of describing the operation of the institution. From a positivist point of view I, as a researcher, had too much power to consider other people. If there is only one truth and my goal is to show it, then my responsibility would be too big to do justice to the actors. I decided to capture the system, which I thought to be guilty. I can blame the system — it seemed to me. So, I could breathe a little bit easier. The system wears you out. I can write about the system without blaming people who are tied up with this system. But what is 'the system'? How can you see the system without people? There is no system without people. People, their activity, their relations are the only possibility to tell anything about the 'system'. I was afraid of being accused of being overly subjective, which in an Estonian context means non-scientific. In Estonia, science in general means positivism and if somebody uses qualitative data, it is also done within a positivist paradigm, namely, with a controlling hypothesis by using qualitative interview, or using the content analysis method in media studies.

Thinking in positivist (objectivist, according to a traditional sociological view) way, I could be sure that what I was seeing really happened, but I could not be sure that other people would see it the same way. Everyone has his/her own viewpoint and interprets events according to this viewpoint. Should I guess how they see the reality? (Actually, I could very well guess what the most welcome description of institution would be for the management and other specialists in this area. Later I will describe their opinions which I received in interviews. But this data only gives an insufficient picture of the institutional management of troubled young people.) What would be the objectivity in this way of thinking?



In a word, during the period that I was under the influence of a positivist point of view, I was faced with an almost insoluble task. I had to give an 'objective' view using a 'subjective' research method with the terminology of positivist theory. It took quite long time, which I spent with looking for acceptable solution.

Reading the literature (the most important of them for me were: Atkinson 1990, Bakhtin 1979, Bauman 1990, Berger & Luckmann 1966, Billig 1991, Blumer 1986, Burr 1997, Cohen 1985, 1992, Coffey 1999, Foucault 1972, 1991, 1996, Giddens 1993, Goffman 1959, 1961, 1967, 1990, Hammersley & Atkinson 1983, Jokinen *et al.* 1999, Karvinen *et al.* 1999, Riesman 1994, Luckman 1999, Mead 1934, Silverman 1994, Spector & Kitsuse 1977, Van Dijk 1997) and discussions with social scientists in Finland and in Estonia brought me around to the social constructionist understanding of social reality which seemed to me to be most persuasive. Thanks to the constructionist theory I could complete this work after all. At the same time, it gave me a new worldview in general. However, I must say that it was not easy and took a long time before I started to understand the meaning of the literature and discussions, which I had already shared.

To summarise, the right choice of qualitative method and the difficulties in realising the research on an acceptable level led me to change the theoretical paradigm.

### 1.2.3. Adoption of Social Constructionism

Thus, first step in the change paradigm was the question of objectivity-subjectivity. The scientific quality in a positivist approach is exactly tied with the objective meaning of data and a subjective assessment is always questionable. If we start from the understanding that social reality exists objectively, that is, external to social actors and human opinion, and social phenomena have their predetermined character, nature and so on in a positivist sense, then the aim of research is to reveal this inherent character. (Miller & O'Connor 1999: 239–41, Burr 1997: 5–8, Rodwell 1998: 12–15, Giddens 1993, Rossman & Rallis 1991: 28–31. etc.). But even during observation it is possible to notice changes in some phenomena, and the changes

were made by the actors' opinions. Moreover, I could notice how I, as a researcher (i.e. a social actor), influenced the phenomenon that I studied. How could I speak about the objectivity of study?

Burr (1997: 160) points out that objectivity is impossible.

*"No human being can step outside of her or his humanity and view the world from no position at all, which is what the idea of objectivity suggests, and this is just as true of scientists as of everyone else."*

At the same time, if we accept the idea that a human being him/herself is also a result of social construction, then how can we speak about subjectivity? Each one of us bears in his/herself many details about the whole cultural and historical world, if in no other way than in language.

The results of this change could be summarised shortly as the main theoretical principles of social constructionism, which are essential to current research.

Social reality is *constructed* by human beings during their everyday *interactions*, which is the basic social activity.

Social reality is the *meaningful* part of the world. In accordance with symbolic interactionism, social constructionists see the entity of social reality as a result of social interactions between people. During these interactions the world is defined and interpreted, provided with meanings.

*"The meaning of everything has to be formed, learned, and transmitted through a process of indication — a process that is necessarily a social process. Human group life on the level of symbolic interaction is vast process in which people are forming, sustaining, and transforming the objects of their world as they come to give meaning to objects. ... Objects have no fixed status except as their meaning is sustained through indications and definitions that people make of the objects. Nothing is more apparent than that objects in all categories can undergo change in their meaning."* (Blumer 1986: 12)

Social construction is a *collective activity*. Moreover, human beings are also socially constructed. The biological species is an important condition for developing a personality, but not enough — without

social relations, without society the personality could not be developed. As language is the precondition for developing human thinking, thus society is the precondition for development human being.

There are several points of symbolic interactionism developed by Mead and Blumer, which are important also for social constructionism. The first is that the human being is a product of social interactions. This idea of Mead is expressed concisely Blumer (1986: 61):

*"His (Mead) treatment took the form of showing that human group life was the essential condition for the emergence of consciousness, the mind, a world of objects, human beings as organisms possessing selves, and human conduct in the form of constructed acts."*

The main particularity of human being is its potential for producing objects. Moreover, thanks to possessing self a human being is an object also to him, i.e. *"may perceive himself, have conceptions of himself, communicate with himself, and act toward himself."* (Blumer 1986: 62)

The relations between an individual point of view and collective functioning are different. From the individual point of view, social phenomena seems to be objective, independent of human activity with its inner regularities and proper character.

An individual enters into the world, which appears ahead of her/him as a 'ready' phenomenon with its inherent character that is independent of individuals.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) explain the causes of such perceiving with three moments that accompany the constructing processes of social reality. These are externalisation, objectification and internalisation. People's practical experiments, interpretations of the world and phenomena, which are the basis of knowledge, take a distance from the 'authors' and start to live an independent life. Knowledge becomes 'objective' factual truth. Knowledge and behaviour become institutionalised in the course of externalisation and objectification — it is external with regard to a person that he/she has to internalise during the process of socialisation. For a person this externalised and objectified reality seems to be a phenomenon with a pre-given nature. But it seems only from the individual point of view, to whom the social reality seems to be as objective, as objective is physical reality and reality of nature.



Parker (1997: 6) points out the role of human language in the process of constructing the world and externalisation:

*"One of the most powerful tricks of language, and something which is a source of human creativity, is the way it can construct a representation of an object at one moment and seem to refer to that object as if it were something outside, 'out there' at next. Human beings live in a world which is woven with language, and the different symbolic systems which comprise a human community are organised through different competing and cross-connecting discourses which produce a sense of the world as something which is independent of us." (original emphasis)*

Giddens (1993: 20), speaking about the difference between the society and nature, points out *"that nature is not a human product, is not created by human action. While not made by any single person, society is created and recreated afresh, if not ex nihilo, by the participants in every social encounter. The production of society is skilled performance, sustained and 'made to happen' by human beings."* (original emphasis)

Bauman (1990: 144–5) also explains the entity of culture and its difference from the entity of nature, by describing the reasons for such understanding as the following:

*"Culture, which manifests the growing might of mankind as a whole (we may say: the growing independence, freedom of the human species regarding nature), may itself appear to the individual, much like laws of nature, as a fate against which one cannot rebel."*

*As our example shows, culture is indeed a human activity — but an activity which some people perform on some others. Like in the case of the gardener, in any cultural process the roles of the cultivating gardener and the cultivated plants are closely distinguished and kept apart. The reason why such division is less immediately evident in the case of 'human plants' is that more often than not it is not clear who the 'gardener' is. The authority that stands behind the norm which individuals are either shaped by or bound to observe is as a rule diffuse, often anonymous. ... Culture acquires an illusory 'substance'; it seems solid, heavy, pressing and irresistible. ... It does not seem less 'natural' than nature itself. ... Despite its apparently human origin, culture like nature looms high*

*above the reach of the individual, tough and unassailable. Like nature, it stands for 'how things are'. While no one doubts that agriculture or horticulture are human doings, a similar truth is hidden or at least veiled in the case of 'homini-culture'. It is however, no less a truth here than in previous cases."* (original emphasis)

The reason for such a vision lies in the way a human being of enters into the social world. The process of becoming an individual starts with the internalisation of already existing meanings and interpretations.

The process of socialisation, namely, becoming a human being, is impossible without three moments: biological species, interactions (relations with other people) and language, which is the precondition for communication and through communication to thinking (Bakhtin 1979).

Relations between the constructing process and the produced structure are inseparable. Bauman (1990: 149–50) points out the abstract nature of dividing the process of human activity and the social structure as its product.

*"Let us note again that the setting apart of the two planes (context and action, external and internal, objective and subjective) is a product of abstraction. The two theoretically separated planes are not really independent from each other. ... The two theoretically distinct planes are in practice inextricably linked — more like two faces of the same coin than two separate entities. One cannot exist without the other. They may be brought into being and maintained only simultaneously, and together."*

Social constructionists, along with ethnomethodologists and post-structuralists, emphasise the unity of process and product, focusing attention on the permanent reproduction of the 'structure', which they designate with term 'discourse'. However, this term has lots of meanings and it is used by different scientific tendencies. Burr speaks about only two general approaches to discourse.

*"A productive line of inquiry has focused upon the performative qualities of discourse, that is, what people are doing with their talk or writing, what they are trying to achieve. ... Research and writing about 'discourse' in this tradition focuses upon how accounts are constructed and bring about effect for the speaker and writer*



*... or upon what rhetorical devices are used by people and how they are employed." (Burr 1997: 47).*

Parker (1997: 6) gives a working definition of a discourse as *"statements that define different objects, whether as things that are outside and independent of us or inside and part of us. ... The discourses not only produce a sense of the world as something which is independent of us. These discourses not only produce for us a picture of the world 'out there', but with the growth of the psy-complex, they also encourage us to talk about and feel that there are certain kinds of objects 'in here'."* He agrees with Foucault who defines discourse as *"practices, which form objects of which they speak"* (Foucault (1972: 49). Discourse both for Foucault and Parker not only exists as a type of talk or writing, that is, simply linguistic work or construction in language, but *"... a 'regime of truth' which makes it difficult for participants to challenge the 'realities' it refers to. ... Discursive practices are the sites in institutions like prisons and schools where we are made to act and be in certain ways."* (ibid: 7)

The other approach emphasises discourses as produced knowledge and performance of people about the world in terminology of Potter and Wetherell (1987) is called as 'interpretative repertoires'. McGhee and Miell (1998: 69) define 'interpretative repertoires' as following:

*"These are the topics and to a lesser extent the ways of speaking and writing which are already in the culture and which are available to be drawn on by social actors in their everyday dealings with each other. In their strongest and most extreme forms they might be considered as ideologies. Other forms might involve the clichés of everyday life as they exist in discourses about politics, relationships, technology and so on — in fact, every aspect of human activity that can be talked about. These repertoires are made up of connected images and metaphors which are invoked in conversations or texts and which offer means of classifying and evaluating incidents, problems and ideas in terms of constructions already worked out and publicly available in culture. This idea of interpretative repertoires is offered by discourse analysts to emphasise and help explore the idea that communication and meaning*

*exists in culture outside of any individual, or individual conversation or text."*

Burr points out the textual character of this understanding:

*"A discourse about an object is said to manifest itself in texts — in speech, say a conversation or interview, in written material such as novels, newspaper articles or letters, in visual images like magazine advertisements or films, or even in the 'meanings' embodied in the clothes people wear or the way they do their hair. In fact, anything can be 'read' for meaning can be thought of as being a manifestation of one or more discourses and can be referred to as a 'text'. ... Given that there is virtually no aspect of human life that is exempt from meaning, everything around us can be considered as 'textual', and 'life as text' could be said to be the underlying metaphor of the discourse approach."* (Burr 1997: 50–51)

Van Dijk (1997: I, 1–34; II, 1–37) analyses visions of discourse as social interaction (process of social practice) and verbal structure (text and talk) and discusses different kinds of possible discourse analysis methods depending on basic approaches to discourse (compare with the above-quoted words of Bauman on the relation of structure and process). (About the multiple meanings and definitions of discourse, see also Titscher *et al.* 2000).

Human knowledge according to social constructionists *"is formed by social processes which legitimate shared ideas about the world."* (Payne 1999: 34).

Burr (1997: 3–5) emphasises the following characteristics of knowledge from a social constructionist viewpoint:

- Along with phenomenologists, social constructionists reject any taken-for-granted knowledge. If to start from the point of view that the social reality is produced during people's interaction, there is nothing that could be defined as the pre-given character of the social phenomena except its nature of being constructed in the process of human activity. This grounds a critical stance towards 'taken-for-granted' knowledge. No phenomena, no events have an inherent meaning *per se*. Meanings and character are the product of collective activity.

- Human beings in the process of their everyday activity construct social reality, which means that it is in permanent change. This peculiarity of the tie with people's activity and experiences constitutes everlasting historical and cross-cultural changes. Knowledge is historically and culturally specific — *"that means that all ways of understanding are historically and culturally relative. Not only are they specific to particular cultures and period of history, they are seen as products of that culture and history, and are dependent upon the culture at that time."*(my emphasis)
- Knowledge is sustained by social processes — *"It is through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life that our version of knowledge become fabricated."*

Knowledge and the process of the construction of reality depend on each other. The achieved knowledge deeply influences the constructing process: every new interpretation is based on existing knowledge, on the one hand, and, on the other, produces new understandings and new experiences, that is, new knowledge.

The moment of reflexivity plays a substantial role in the social constructionist way of thinking about producing knowledge. According to Rodwell, (1998: 262) reflexivity is: *"The ability of the human mind to turn back on itself and, therefore, know that it is knowing."*

Tindall and Banister (1998: 101) emphasise using Kelly's term of sociality corollary concerning the exploration of reflexivity, which *"can be seen as our ability to construe the construction process of others, to understand their personal reality. ... We must remember, however, that we as outsiders are onlookers, and thus have a more distant as well as a physically different view of the interaction. In addition, when people are known to us, we have our own ideas of their agendas, and of how each participant relates to other group members — ideas which of course will influence our observations. ... It is important to acknowledge that your analysis is inevitably one outsider's personal construction, one of many possible interpretations, inevitably constrained by your own frameworks and the societally available realities open to you."* (original emphasis)



On reflexivity, Burr (1997: 161) specifies:

*"As well as referring to the way that the theory re-constitutes the role of respondents, their relationship to the researcher and the status of their accounts, the term is also used in at least two other ways. Firstly, reflexivity is used to draw attention to the fact that, when someone gives an account of an event, that account is simultaneously a description of the event and part (because of the constitutive nature of talk). Secondly, and this is the more widely used meaning, reflexivity refers to the fact that social constructionism itself is not exempt from the critical stance it brings to bear on other theories. Social constructionism, as body of theory and practice, therefore must recognise itself as just as much a social construction as are other ways of accounting."*

### 1.3. The Aim of the Research and the Research Questions

As I have already mentioned, with the restoration of independence a new social problem of troublesome children and young people appeared. Many of the first social workers in restored Estonia turned to this issue. Along with the growth of social work was a concomitant rise in the number of studies dedicated to youngster's problems. Researchers from different disciplines and professions dealt with the problems of children and young people: pedagogues (Kraav & Kõiv 2001; Kõiv 1995, 2000, 2001, etc.), special pedagogues (Aunapuu 1989, 1992; Kõrgesaar 1998, 1999; Petersell 1997), psychologists (Haldre 2000, Saar 1990, 1988) sociologists (Ainsaar 2000; Kutsar 1996, 1997, 2000; Tiit 2000), medical doctors (Toomberg 1994), lawyers (Kaugia 2000, Ginter 2000, Raska 1980, Saarsoo 1995, Sootak 2000), policemen (Nurmela 1997), and most of all, the first representatives of social work (Tulva 1996, 1999, Kadajane 1995, Kilk 2000, Laane 1999, 2000, Suislepp 1996, Tikerpuu & Tulva 1998, Strömpl 1995, etc.).

One group of studies focused on the general problems of children in Estonia after the restoration of independence. Most of them were carried out as part of a grant and financed by UNICEF or UN (Toomberg 1994, Kutsar 2000, Ainsaar 2000). These studies de-



scribe the economic, health, and social situation of Estonian children and young people and are generally based on statistical data.

Another group of studies was tied to the new type of education, that is, the new matriculation system. Master's degree study was not known in the Soviet Union<sup>4</sup>. Now, the topics of first master's theses in the above-mentioned professions were often written about the new phenomena — the social problems of children and young people. So, for example the master's thesis of Tiiu Kadajane (1995) examines school truancy in Tartu and attempts to find solutions for this problem by developing school social work. In her master's thesis, Mare Leino (1996) offers pedagogical and social pedagogical solutions to the question of problem children in ordinary schools. From the perspective of special education, Owe Petersell (1997) researches the causes of delinquency in the behavioural skills of young people in special institutions comparing them with the behavioural skills of young people in ordinary schools. Estelle Laane (2000) describes in her master's thesis her own practical work in a rehabilitation centre in Tallinn, which manages street children and young people with substance abuse problems. Most of these studies focus on the personality of children and young people in trouble and

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<sup>4</sup> There was diploma after five years of university study in the Soviet Union, after that there was a three-year course, which gave the first scientific degree (candidate), and after that came the so-called big doctoral degree. After the restoration of independence, Estonia started to change its educational system and starting from 1991 undergraduate study included three-year diploma (120 credits), four-year bachelor degree study (160 credits). After the bachelor degree, which included the former Soviet diploma, there was the two-year master degree (80 credits) and doctoral (PhD) degree (160 credits). In 1990s, because standards for master level were not developed, the problem of finding a proper scientific estimation for the new master theses were quite high. This was especially true in the case of social work, because it was a new issue and it was not clear what the field should be. At the University of Tartu, the problems in master theses were identified through the former candidate theses, however, some of the former candidates could not receive scientific recognition of their work as being on the new PhD level. Now, in the beginning of 2000s, the value of master degree is undergoing reassessment, and it is going to be less valued as it was in the middle of 1990s.

the circumstances of their living environment by conducting tests, questionnaires, or collecting personal cases.

Here I can situate my own master's degree research (Strömpl 1995), which also explores the characteristics of the K. School residents, focusing on their needs, and ending with the question of how the activity of the K. School satisfies these needs, by looking at the working methods used. In short, I examine the effect of institution on the residents.

In December 1998 – April 1999, a study of special needs schools for young people with behavioural deviations (Körgesaar 1999) was conducted, which described the official and latent functions of these institutions. The study gives a good basis for comparing the results of this research and my own (current) research results. This is true especially because Körgesaar's project study was carried out with a different method, though also a qualitative research method. The data was gathered through structured individual and focus-group interviews, and attempted to test the preliminarily prepared hypotheses. These two studies could be assessed as complementary to each other.

According to the social constructionist study, the whole process of the constitution of social problem should be taken into account: the act, its social effect, and the social reaction to it. Hence, the following moments are important.

First, if we observe any social phenomenon as result of social construction, which is a collective activity, then children's trouble-making is also a product of such collective activity including not only the act, but also the societal reaction to it.

Second, residential management as one of the possible reactions and attempts to solve the problem are also a part of this construction.

Third, knowledge about the construction process is also a part of the same process.

With regard to the above-mentioned, the aim of this research is to observe and describe the process of the construction of residential management of troublesome girls, specifically at the K. School.

I will seek answers to the following main research questions

- How are the social actors (residents and staff) constructed?

- How is the residential management (social activity) constructed in the everyday institutional operation?
- How are the changes in society concerning the transition in Estonia produced at the K. School?
- What we can learn about the life today in Estonia on the basis of knowledge obtained from the K. School?

This is a different approach in the observation social problems, which gives new knowledge about social problems, which could be the basis for seeking new alternatives to solving problems.

According to traditional thinking about social problems, people tend to tie the problem to some inherent quality of the problematic person, or some 'objective' cause that produce the problem. In social constructionist study, the focus is on social activity during which the social problem as object is constructed. (Spector & Kitsuse 1977; Cohen 1985,1992; Christie 1992; Blumer 1971, Emerson 1969, Emerson & Messinger 1977, etc.)

#### **1.4. Once More about Ethnography as the Research Method**

As I have mentioned already, the method of collecting and presenting the data that is used is ethnography. Ethnography is one alternative research method, which has its advantages especially for studying social phenomena from a constructionist point of view (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983: 23). See also Creswell's (1998: 73–88) introduction of the five qualitative research traditions and especially their connection with theoretical and philosophical bases.

For me, social constructionism is in logical harmony with the ethnographic participant observation that I had possibility to experience and about which I have already informed the reader. However, the method was born in a positivist context and has also been used by scholars of other schools and paradigms. Denzin and Lincoln point this out in the two editions of their classic work, *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (1994, 2000), where they describe the historical development of qualitative research in seven moments.



It was during this development when the understanding of ethnographic research itself as social interaction, that is, as part of social reality (see also Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983: 25) arose. With this new understanding, scholars pointed out the ethnographer him/herself and his/her autobiography became part of the research. (See, for instance, writings on autoethnography by Ellis & Bochner [2000], or the self-analysis of the ethnographer-self by Coffey [1999].)

Rossman and Rallis (1998) describe qualitative research as a learning process. The learning process in ethnographic research is, on the one hand, a subjective process, because the researcher is using her or his own experience in the field and constructs and represents the reality learned by her/him. On the other hand, no learning process in ethnographic field could be pure and simply subjective. Subjective experiences occurred in interaction with other subjects in the same field. All of the subjects of whatever study as well as the researcher are active parts of producing knowledge about the object of study. Hence, the data of ethnographic research should be observed as a result of collective work (see also Moerman 1988).

The development of the research problem in ethnography is rarely completed before fieldwork begins; "*... the collection of primary data often plays a key role in that process of development.*" (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983: 40)

#### 1.4.1. Entering Into the Field

In ethnography, in contrast to other research methods, the fieldwork embraces the researcher completely, becoming a part of his/her autobiography (Coffey 1999: 17; 116–124, Ellis & Bochner 2000: 739–743, Tedlock 2000: 465–470, etc.). Participating means involvement to the life of studied area. But the researcher is simultaneously also an outsider, a stranger and maintaining distance is as important to successful fieldwork as becoming close and familiar.

It is a moot question to ask how one prefers to behave in the field. Hammersley and Atkinson point out the importance of keeping a balance between two roles (observer and participant).



*"The 'complete observer' generally escapes the danger of going 'native' of course, but only at the risk of failing to understand the perspective of participants. Moreover, this is not simply a matter of missing out on an important aspect of the setting: it may well lead to serious misunderstanding of the behaviour observed. ... While ethnographers may adopt a variety of roles, the aim throughout is to maintain a more or less marginal position. ... The ethnographer must be intellectually poised between 'familiarity' and 'strangeness', while socially he or she is poised between 'stranger' and 'friend'. He or she is, in the title of the collection edited by Freilich (1970), a 'marginal native'. (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983: 100)*

However, the relations in field have also their development. In the beginning the ethnographer is interested in quickly entering and being accepted by other social actors in the field. The importance of how the other actors trust the ethnographer is emphasised by writers. This trust depends on many circumstances. One important thing is the nature of the field (is it an institution or a cultural group, how open is it for outsiders, etc.) the relations with gatekeeper(s) (managers of institutions or leaders, etc.), relations between the gatekeepers — managers or leaders — and other social actors — middle or low-level staff, ordinary group members, and so on.

There are different techniques for managing these circumstances.

Coffey (1999) writes about this process, which starts with the creation of ethnographer's body. According to the ethnographer's aim, he/she takes the role of participant, borrowing Goffman's terminology, 'presents' him/herself as a participant. In my case, entering to the field was quick enough, however, I was aware and even afraid of the hazard of being too deeply involved by participating. I preferred to reach other subjects in field through external moments. For instance, I tried to dress very simply. I tried to be like an educator, but also not very different from the residents by wearing jeans and jumpers.

People test how far they can trust the researcher. 'Impression management' means that the ethnographer tries to be closer and more understandable to people in the field: dressing, vocabulary, behaviour, and adaptation. It is complex work. The self-presentation of the researcher should be honest. Sometimes it could help some personal particularities. For instance, I think that the Estonian resi-

dents trusted me because my Estonian language skills were less sophisticated than Russian. I noticed many times that the Russian girls did not understand some of the words I was used. I had to explain what these words meant, while my Estonian language was more simple. Later I learned the vocabulary of the Russian residents and used it in communication with them. However, I did not change my behaviour very much, because I thought that I would not be trusted if I 'played' somebody other than I really am.

In relations with the other subjects of study, especially with key informants, the ethnographer creates friendly relations. This is evident because the ethnographer is straightforwardly interested in key informants as people who know very much about the field and who can explain the impenetrable events and moments. Many ethnographers refer to the friendly relations created during the fieldwork. However, the ethnographer should be aware of the responsibility regarding these relations. This means that the researcher should not forget about the end of fieldwork. For me it was surprising how quickly people could forget in their everyday activity tasks that involve people intellectually and emotionally in other roles not directly connected with their personal life. I had this experience, which somehow startled me, because people told me their very personal stories which I, as an ethnographer, should not know. In a word, interpersonal relations in field do not differ from human relations in ordinary life. The researcher should be aware of this and remember that he/she responds to these relations more. For the ethnographer the most difficult work with these relations actually starts after leaving the field and beginning the analysis and preparing the data for presentation.

#### **1.4.2. Field Procedures and Data Management**

The fieldwork took place from 1 February to 31 May 1997 — four months. It involved spending time at the institution, participating and observing the everyday life of residents and work of the staff, making notes, speaking with people, interviewing staff members and solving tasks as an educator. There was a very important moment regarding my role in the field connected with a condition fixed by

the management. My entering to the K. School would be allowed only if the residents did not know about the research. To my question of why this is so important, I received the explanation that if the girls would know that I am not an ordinary educator, they would use me for their interests. So, for the residents I was just an ordinary educator.

The fact that the residents were not aware of the research being conducted was the source of many ethical problems that I did not foresee in the beginning. I very much wanted to begin my field work period and was wary of anything that could possibly disrupt the process. I did agree to delegate the responsibility for this issue to the management of the institution. I knew the significance of the principle of a human being as an object of study needing to be aware of the study, but I also knew that a closed institution had its own peculiar quality. However, I had no practical experience of this, and hence I trusted the manager to be a better judge of what would work best for all of us. This turned out to be a huge mistake and impossible to correct later. Unknowingly, the residents shared intimate details of their life stories with me, which I used as research material. The stories seemed to be extremely important to filling out the characterisations of the residents, and without them, the final work would be much poorer.

Perhaps I can make two excuses and hope they are acceptable to the reader. Firstly, the individual residents in question have long since left the K. School; secondly, the stories that I use in my work are, unfortunately, stories quite typical of any troubled young girl in Estonia at that time. Nevertheless, these excuses do not relieve me from my ethical responsibility in the eyes of the residents. The only thing I can do is to strongly emphasise the importance of the responsibility of providing the subjects of any study with as much information as possible on the study. The researcher must also be aware of the ethical problematic concerning the collection of qualitative data. When I teach qualitative research methods to the students of the University of Tartu these days, I attempt to drive home this very point.

Despite the fact that the staff members knew about the research, they seemed to try to forget about it and thus my entering into the institution was accepted first of all by the through with my educator



job. There was no introduction of me as a researcher to the working team and in the face of my explanations of my role as a researcher to the staff members in private conversations they seemed to prefer to meet me as a new colleague-educator.

However, when entering into the K. School I had the impression that the staff was informed about reason of my coming before I started my job. The general acceptance of me was positive. The colleagues were friendly and helpful, they happily explained the details of daily regime and answered my questions concerning the rules. Most of the staff members agreed to give me an interview. Only one person refused to speak with me.

The subjects of interviews were staff at management and middle level (teachers, educators, and workshop instructors). Seventeen staff interviews were conducted, which included almost the whole pedagogical staff body that was active at that time. Arranging and planning the interviews was difficult because of frequent and unexpected changes at the institution. For example, a person who one day is at work and agrees to give an interview the next day, then disappears the next day and I am told that she is to be on sick leave for a long time. Thus I had to abandon the interview of one teacher. Some of the staff members evidently avoided me and one person straightway rejected the idea of an interview. But, in general, the staff was open to speaking about the school and about their work. However, they preferred to speak about these topics in the way of free conversation. The circumstances of an official interview made them nervous. Only one mid-level staff member said that I could publish anything she is told because she was not afraid of anybody. But she was alone — other staff members were afraid and this makes my task more difficult in publishing the interview data. This is one reason why most of the interviews were not tape-recorded but recorded in note form during the interview. Milofsky (1990) attributes a specific importance to his not using video and tape-recording. He emphasises the importance of the researcher's interpretation. Such an attitude seems to be acceptable to me, however, I am sorry for the lack of an opportunity to tape record some of the interviews.

The interviews took place in different rooms of the main building (the educators' room, staff room, and head office) at the homes of staff members, and in my quarters in K. Some of the interviews



were interrupted and continued later. Sometimes the interviewee came to me after a time and added something to her answer.

The interview questions covered three topics: first, the educational and occupational life of the interviewee, including her route into this sort of work and her motivation; second, the interviewee's point of view on the general problems with her work; and third, the interviewee's views on the ideal path of development for the institution. These topics were formulated in 10 main open-ended interview questions:

- *How long have you been working here?*
- *What is your educational background?*
- *How did you come to work here?*
- *How would you explain the nature of your work?*
- *What is the aim of your work and what problems do you face in achieving it?*
- *What do you think you do particularly well?*
- *What would you like to change and how is that change possible?*
- *What do you need to achieve this change?*
- *What do you think are the personal qualities, knowledge, and skills needed for this job?*
- *What does this job offer you personally?*

Those questions were, however, used more as topics for conversations. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 112–3), the ethnographic interview *"like any other kind of social interaction, is structured by both researched and informant. The important distinction to be made is between standardised and reflexive interviewing."*

Some, but not all, of the interviewees answered all the questions. Some respondents focused more on their own area of interest. Two favourite themes emerged: stories about particular residents and comparison with the 'old Soviet times'. The middle staff members also spoke a lot about their personal life problems, coping with the material and emotional difficulties that the topics did not include in the data. This information about the needs of the staff members dealt with these kinds of problems — such as, psychological and psycho-social supervision or the importance of a mental-health facility for the staff which was not done at this time at the institution.

A large and the most valuable part of data was produced on the basis of free conversations with the residents and the other personnel and visitors (parents, relatives and friends of the residents). As the residents did not know about the research I could not conduct any traditional (classical) interviews with them and all the notes about the residents' stories were written up after the meetings.

So these stories should be assessed mostly as my impressions of the girls' stories. However, I have always had the opportunity to check any information from the same girl later (if I was not sure of my memory) and clarify facts in their personal dossier. For instance, details of the girls' school career, parents' applications, child protection inspector descriptions about the home and family background of the girl were in the dossier. A special part of the information on the residents consists of the staff members' narratives on the residents — in general and in concrete cases.

This description of the way that the data producing was carried out shows that the data as a whole were produced rather in natural conversations between the subjects of study and myself, during which the roles of 'investigator' and 'investigated' were extinct.

A great deal of attention was paid to the interactions between the different actors at the institution which I observed at close hand or where I participated as an active member. These interactions were described as scenes that consist of the verbalised conceptions of actors' opinions, from the description of an action and in some cases, from the interpretation of the actor of her act.

As I was making the field notes, I followed the instructions of H. S. Becker (1970) who stressed the point of gathering as much information about the field as possible. I always carried a notebook and a pen with me, and made a note of every incident that took place in as much detail as possible: what happened and how it happened. I also followed one of Becker's recommendations: Make notes immediately or at the first possible occasion. Naturally, there were situations when making notes was not possible, such as when I was occupied in my duty as an educator. However, generally the opportunities for taking notes were ample. In the mornings, I was busy doing practical things in the role of the educator between 7.30 and 10 o'clock. After that time, the girls were in school at their classes and I had the chance to write down what had happened

during the early morning hours. In staff meetings, when observing classes at the school or during vocational training I had the opportunity to freely take notes. I also attempted to take notes during the individual study time, if there was a moment to spare in between the students asking for my help. This, however, rarely occurred and mostly all I could do was to mark down certain specific words or sentences that the girls used, and later reconstruct the events on paper.

At times, I had the possibility to write down descriptions of entire scenes simultaneously while they were taking place. For instance, the scene described in chapter 5.2.4 ('cleaning the toilet') took place at such a time when I had just finished the task of checking up on the conditions of the girls' rooms and had a moment to sit in the educators' room exactly opposite the toilet. I was immersed in routine paperwork, when the conversation in the toilet caught my attention. I took my notebook and wrote down the incident and the conversation exactly as they happened in front of my eyes. Unfortunately, such ideal situations from the viewpoint of a researcher were exceptional.

In addition to the few hours I had free after morning duty, I also used the evening hours I spent alone in my own room in K. to record the events of the day on paper.

I had days off duty every week. Those times I travelled home and entered my field notes into the computer. Hence, the final version of the field notes was also compiled during the actual field work period. As I typed my notes on the computer, I first made entries of all the hand-written notes. Then I both complemented those with added information I remembered during the typing. When I wrote the computer version of the field notes, I had the best opportunity to recall and record my personal thoughts, emotions and comments in concern of the events. The computer version of the field notes formed a text on three different levels: the original field notes were written in ordinary type, the notes which I added from memory were written in italics, and, finally, my own thoughts, emotions and comments were typed in capital only. In fact, this was also the first step of the text analysis.

Later, as I worked with the texts further, I regarded the first and the second types of texts as 'the objective data', and the third — my



own comments — I analysed as the first interpretation. Certainly, I have to underline the very relative character of such 'objectivity': I, as a participant in interactions, could only represent them in my descriptions through my personal perspective. However, whenever it was possible, I also asked for interpretations of some other participants in the same interactive situations and wrote them down in my field notes.

In view of all the circumstances that are concerned with the specifics of data producing as a result of social interaction, I consider it as a text which is the basis of analysis (Atkinson 1990, Coffey 1999, Coffey *et al.* 1996, Luckmann 1999, etc.) All of the quoted examples should be viewed as quotations from the field notes where the scenes and dialogues are fixed in roles and expressions are written down in 'me-form'.

#### 1.4.3. Leaving the Field and the Representation the Data

Leaving the field is again a difficult process. When and how to leave the field? A good indicator to end the fieldwork is when the ethnographic notes on being in field include too much of the routines of a participant which indicate that he/she is losing the role of observer. The time of leaving is also good when it is tied with some cycle finishing. In my case, it was quite easy to leave the institution when the school year was finished and many residents left the school forever or for summer holidays.

The whole process of the analysis of the data was started during the period of the fieldwork. I needed the analysis in my everyday duties as an educator to work out and resolve current problems. In this capacity, I used the analysis especially to help me to find explanations for the meanings of different phenomena and events.

The first step of representation is the creation of field notes. This work requires special techniques (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983: 145–56; Becker 1970: 39–62). However, their adequacy is involuntarily limited by the ethnographer's personality. He/she makes choices that depend on his/her interests. Moreover, it is impossible to capture everything. Despite these moments, the result of this work is that the ethnographer has a thick description of the studied



field, which is the basis of his/her representation of the studied reality. When analysing the data captured in the field notes, the researcher creates his/her story (narrative) about the studied phenomenon. Some problems are tied here with the continuing need to think about the reader and decide which knowledge is well-known and what should be explained and described in detail. The researcher should guess what is new knowledge for the reader without which he/she could not understand the text and what could be skipped. For the researcher, it is an intellectual, emotional and ethical work. The most difficult is that 'translation' process when the researcher transmits the activity of concrete human beings to social actions or social roles. However, I agree with Atkinson (1990: 7) when he writes that *"... the notion of reflexivity recognises that texts do not simply and transparently report an independent order of reality. Rather, the texts themselves are implicated in the work of reality-construction."*

After I had left the field and began the 'real' analysis of the data, I realised I was facing very deep problems with it. Every time I took my field notebook and began to read it, I had a surge of very strong and very negative feelings that interfered with my ability to 'see' the data for what it was in general. My emotions varied from anxiety to panic, and I found no way to cope with these feelings. The task of delving into my field notes loomed ahead of me as a mission impossible. In the end, I was only able to return to my field notes nearly a year after finishing my field work, and to begin their analysis as a text which described events I had now managed to distance my personal emotions from. (Here I have to emphasise that despite my difficulties in returning to the field notes, I was constantly thinking about the experiences in the field, the K. School, and the research. However, most of the time I filled with reading relevant scientific literature.)

When I finally returned to my notebook and began to analyse its contents, I first wanted to see what the hard facts in the data actually provided me with. I read the field notebook several times through, and coded the text by using an open coding method I borrowed from grounded theory. This brought up and crystallised the core of the most important topics and categories from the body of

the text. I composed a codebook in which the themes constituted a hierarchical system.

The next level was to look at the relationships between the different categories of the codebook. I paid special attention to the actors' interpretations of both the events that had occurred as well as each other, and added my own interpretations. This resulted in a detailed interpretation, or in Geertz's (1973) terminology, a thick description.

When doing this, I resorted to and found great assistance in Bakhtinian theory, which, in fact, is the basis for critical discourse analysis (see Titscher et al 2000: 145–6). In the process of trying to make sense of the differences in the meanings of the general and individual usage of words and concepts, the metaphors and rhetoric that were used during the period of transition in Estonian society became apparent to me (see more in detail in chapter 6.1).

During this process of analysis, some of the topics that had emerged during the coding were of particular interest to me, while others did not seem quite as important. What I mean is that the data also includes other issues of importance that could and should be analysed further. However, at that time they seemed of a lesser relevance to my task. Hence I omitted any deeper analysis of those data but rather chose to make only a passing reference to them in my thesis.

I returned to those topics in other publications. For instance, there is a published article in the Estonian language entitled "Changing of Strategies of the Restoration of Social Involvement in a Total Institution", which further discusses the questions of inclusion/exclusion after the restoration of independent Estonia and particularly focuses on the ethnic issue.

Some topics were left without deeper analysis also because of the already-large size of my thesis. I had the task of providing the reader with a detailed picture of the institution in question. Having both the Estonian and the outside reader as my imagined audience, it was important to explain a wealth of details concerning the institution in the Estonia of the mid-1990s.

The ethnographic text should have its criterion. Atkinson (1990) lists in detail what such criterion are. First of all it should be persuasive as a scientific text. In my text, I use lot of quotations from field

notes, analysing and interpreting them. My general way of analysis is to relay the meanings that the actors attributed to events and processes as I observed and could perceive them during our everyday interactions and conversations on the basis of verbal and non-verbal activity of people, reflecting on and interpreting them on the basis of my own experiences which I received during the period in the field and working with scientific texts.

Van Maanen (1988) identified three types of ethnographic descriptions: 'realist', 'confessional' and 'impressionist'. A 'realist' narrator "passes on more-or-less objective data in a measured intellectual style that is uncontaminated by personal bias, political goals, or moral judgements.". A 'confessional' writer presents the field through his or her personal experiences. The 'impressionist' style of tale is dramatic recall. It gives the opportunity to the audience to create his/her own impression about the field and events. At the end of his book Van Maanen (1988: 138-140) reaches the general conclusion that ethnographic writing "*...is to balance, harmonise, mediate, or otherwise negotiate a tale of two cultures (the fieldworkers' and the others')*. ... *We need to shop around and encourage narrative ingenuity and novel interpretation as potentially put forward in any and all of the three genres. ... We need more, not fewer, ways to tell of culture. The value of ethnography from this standpoint is found not in its analysis and interpretation of culture, but in its decision to examine culture in the first place; to conceptualise it, reflect on it, narrate it, and, ultimately, to evaluate it.*" Being in general agreement with this conclusion, I would like, however, in place of the last words 'to evaluate it' use the words 'to understand it'.

In this work I use 'confessional' and 'impressionist' types of tales by turns.

The use of terms like "stage", "actors", and "action" is tied on the one hand with the impressionist style of writing, and on the other hand, it should emphasise the interactionist approach in the presentation of the institution and the reference to the tradition proceeding from Erving Goffman (1959, 1961, 1967) who observed social actions and social role playing as an analogy to theatrical presentation.

After finishing the fieldwork and starting to analyse the data I was surprised by how many details I had fixed and how little I un-



derstood about those details when I captured them. I can repeat the thought of Luckmann (1999: 389), who pointed out *"that scientific analysis 'begins' with the production of data, namely by observation and description of that which has been observed."* He is right when he writes that: *"Attention and effort should be shifting more and more to the analysis of the 'production process' in relation to the 'product' and in relation to the 'consumption' of the 'product', namely to interaction and dialogue as both a part of social reality and as source of much of social reality."*

Because of my two roles, which I had to play simultaneously (educator and researcher) my time was limited for such analysis. The educator work required intensive attention and always being ready for some new and unexpected event and quick reaction. This role gave me lot for understanding the quality of the interactions with the residents, but also took my energy away from observation and thinking about observing. Later, when I was alone with my data I felt a strong desire to live the fieldwork period through again, to specify the details to ask about and to discuss again and again what the words mean, to understand how the actors who spoke about meanings by saying this or that. But even when I asked after some days what the person meant when she told this or that, as a rule she could not remember already what was the situation and what she actually wanted to tell. Hence, I feel that I lost something because of occupying the dual roles of educator and researcher. And I think next time I would spend much more time with discussions and would try to better understand what the participants of study think when they tell something. I also would be more open in telling my own opinions as an observer. This means that I would emphasise my researcher's role and functions more. It would give a better understanding to the people in the field, to know what they can expect from a researcher. I have to confess that I was not exactly aware of my function as a researcher. The understanding of the role of discussions in the field came much later.

Our communication with the gatekeepers at that time was a compromise: in place of doing my research (which was as much for the institution as for me) I was paid for educator job.



During the description of events and phenomena I try to analyse them on the basis of data that was produced during the field. However, sometimes I give my own explanations for them and cannot always to compare these explanations with other social actors of the field. In such cases I point out that it is just my explanation and with regard to such an explanation I am aware that there could also be other explanations for the same phenomena. By doing this I hope to give the reader the opportunity to make his/her own conclusions.

With concern to the representation of the results of my study, I had the task of solving the following problem: how much of the concrete examples should I use from my data? My field notebook was abundant with descriptions of dramatised scenes, dialogues and monologues, actions and stage descriptions. This data speaks for itself. Including them in my final work as examples of my findings seemed to be the most effective way of persuading my readers. However, if I did so I would once more be faced with the ethical problems described earlier. Including a lot of detailed descriptions in the final text meant risking that the actors could recognise themselves and each other. I attempted to minimise and even change some details of personal characteristics; I even tried to leave out everything that was strictly personal — that is, not tied directly to the daily operation of the institution. I did not include any especially detailed description of the interviewees; I used random letters instead of names in my examples to make the scenes more general to the reader. However, I am quite aware of the fact that the actors are able to recognise themselves. My research strongly includes the aspect of describing social roles, but it is living human beings that play social roles. How would it be possible to reconstruct their activities without the risk of recognition? Is it at all possible to reconstruct the social life in an actual, existing institution, during an actual, identified period of time without the danger that some of the actors eventually recognise themselves from the text? This is, however, a risk and an ethical load I am prepared to carry.

In order to protect the participants of the study from being recognised by themselves or each other, I have decided not to include the original versions of quotations in endnotes as earlier planned.

## 2. THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY: Theoretical and Practical Knowledge of the Research Topic

In this chapter, I discuss the relationship between knowledge of the nature of childhood troubles and deviation, and the reaction to them. Whether the reaction of society means using/applying more care and protection or control and deterrence; whether the focus is on treatment or punishment, depends on the level of knowledge about the nature of phenomenon. The connection between knowledge and social activity is one of the basic concepts of social constructionism, which is developed on the Foucauldian concept of knowledge and power (Foucault 1972/1994, 1976, 1996). I would also like to emphasise here that besides knowledge, the interests of different actors and groups play an essential role. The same knowledge can be used quite differently in regard to different interests. This depends on interpretation and examination as well as on how people use the knowledge. For instance, knowledge of the stigmatising effect of a total institution can result in profound changes within the institutional system, or to closing down such total institutions altogether leaving people in need without any help or care.

Society's reaction to deviation from childhood norms depends on the current understanding of those norms. I do not intend to make a deep analysis of the development of human thought regarding this notion in this chapter, but only wish to highlight the most important points from the perspective of current research in the field.

There are two separate topics discussed here: one is childhood and the other deviance control.

## 2.1. Childhood

The definitions of contemporary childhood and child deviance are tied with the norms that are currently valid in the society. Different authors (Gittins 1998, Goldson 1997, Qvortrup 1991, etc.) put different emphases on what are the most important characteristics concerning childhood, but some common features can be found:

- children's status is a minority status which means dependence on parents or other responsible adults;
- because of their minority status, children have no or only limited responsibility and are represented by adults in society;
- this delegated right of children's representation to adults means, on the one hand, that children's subordination to adults who are responsible for them is compulsory; and on the other hand, there is a need to protect children from too much subordination. This justifies the existence of social control and means that children are under double control;
- because childhood is future-oriented by nature, children should participate in childhood activities, first of all education.

The deviant behaviour of children and young people is directly connected with the norms indicated above that are tied to children's 'normal' activity and behaviour. Ignoring the standards and norms that are designated for human beings under 18 years of age is the first sign of deviation. A child should behave as children are supposed to; subordinate him/herself to the control of parents and trustees, pedagogues and teachers; attend school, and spend his/her free time occupied with activities considered appropriate for children. In general, a child should be protected and controlled by adults and remain in a subordinate position to them as a minority group subordinate to the majority. Respectively, if a child is beyond the reach of protection and control by adults, he/she is potentially at risk to become deviant. Furthermore, if he/she is not placed within the framework described above or does not behave the way that according to the current norms are not considered appropriate for a child, he/she is deviant.

"Status offences, such as running away from home, being incorrigible, truant, or sexually precocious" (Qvortrup 1991: 40), namely,



children's 'adult' behaviour is considered a threat to the social order, and the legal system is supported by scientific ideas of what the ages and stages of childhood should be like (for more about status offence categories in the USA see also Regoli & Hewitt 1997: 31). In defining status offence, not only the child's status as a minor, but also the child's gender is relevant. Thus, Regoli & Hewitt (1997: 423) show the following data of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation:

*"Girls are more likely than boys to be arrested for running away (114,601 and 86,858 arrests, respectively, in 1994). Such arrests comprised 20 percent of all juvenile female arrests, compared with only 5 percent of juvenile male arrests."*

The minority status and boundaries of the adult group around a child can also be the basis for the so-called primary deviation of a child (about the notion of primary and secondary deviation see more in Lemert 1972, Matsueda 1992). As a rule, the characteristics of the adult group that surrounds the child (parents and family) are directly transmitted to the child. Thus, a child from a so-called asocial or troubled family is observed to be a deviant (this is especially true in Estonia today).

Matza (1989) observes mass culture, mass education and juvenile delinquency in connection to one another:

*"The inspirational rhetoric of the superpowers-to-be (of both U.S.A. and Soviet socialism) obscured the rise of a new class system based on education and technical knowledge. The educational class system was actually neither open in process nor classless in consequence. Neither capitalist nor socialist in principle, the new class system of education shared routine features of each and served as a persistent basis for convergence between otherwise rivalrous and belligerent system after 1945. Based on mass education, this twentieth-century system is the basic form of the mass society and a derivative mass culture. The juvenile delinquent is a by-product, a not-so-incidental failure, of this modern mode of an education-based dynamic class system. ... the juvenile delinquent is the school failure whether in the usual sense of lower-class boys stuck in their ways ... or as an indication of a lower-class destiny for better-class children as well as those born that way." (xix)*

## 2.2. Deviance Control

On the historical continuum, the development of deviance control has gradually moved from the notion of protecting the community/society from a person with deviant behaviour towards the notion of protecting the individual him/herself from deviant behaviour. Exactly at what point on the line the emphasis has been placed is based both on the level of knowledge and the understanding of the reasons behind and the essential nature of deviance at the time (see, Downes & Rock 1992, Taylor *et al.* 1992, etc.).

The contemporary system of understanding deviance begins with classical philosophy and the criminology of the Enlightenment, and is tied with names of such philosophers as Hobbes, Montesquieu and Rousseau, and with criminologist Cesare Beccaria who in his 'Dei delitti e delle pene' (1764) (Essay on Crimes and Punishment) first formulated the principles of classical criminology.

Based on social contract theory, "*the classical theory in above all theory of social control: it delimits first, the manner in which the state should react to the criminal, second, those deviations which permit individuals to be labelled as criminals, and third, the social basis of criminal law.*" (Taylor *et al.* 1992: 2-3). The basic idea of the classical theory is that every act that harms other people or society should be proportionally punished. From this viewpoint, people are equal in their rationality and opportunity to share the social contract, and it is by their own free volition if they choose not to do so. Punishment aims at defence by deterring a person from breaking criminal law. If an individual is seen as being solely responsible for his/her behaviour, a criminal act can be understood as committed out of her/his free will and therefore punishment is justified. These basic notions still exist in neo-classical theory, which forms one of the bases for the majority of legal systems of most societies (states).

The other competitive theory that influences the legal system has developed along with the development of positivism in science. The positivist school in criminology was influenced by the development of social sciences of the nineteenth century on the one hand, and with the process of categorisation and classification on the other hand (Foucault 1991, 1997).

Using scientific methods adopted from natural sciences, positivism perceived social reality as an analogy to the physical world. The quantification of social phenomena, including crime and deviance, was the way for the scientific approach. This required preliminary generalisations of different types of behaviour.

Foucault (1991) associates the development of the contemporary control system with the development of knowledge and disciplinary power.

Constructionist knowledge is based on perceiving social processes and phenomena from the viewpoint that organic connections exist between them: everything is simultaneously both an object and a subject, a producer and a product. From this point of view deviation is also observed in connection with other phenomena and processes of the society under examination (see, for instance, the point of view on crime and deviance discussed in Hester & Eglin 1996).

### 2.3. Juvenile Troubles as a Social Problem

There is no phenomena or human being that has an inherent character of deviance *per se*. Some kinds of behaviour and some individuals are defined or interpreted as deviant. The process of defining human conduct as deviant is directly tied not only to the individuals whose behaviour is defined as deviant and not only to those acts that are defined as deviant, but also to those other people who define such activity and such persons as deviant. Kitsuse (1968: 20) distinguishes three stages in this process.

*"Accordingly, deviance may be conceived as a process by which the members of a group, community, or society (1) interpret behaviour as deviant, (2) define persons who so behave as a certain kind of deviant, and (3) accord them the treatment considered appropriate to such deviants."*

Blumer (1971: 231) considers the genesis of social problem, and finds that the process of construction passes through five stages, which are

*"(1) the emergence of a social problem, (2) the legitimisation of problem, (3) the mobilisation of action with regard to the problem,*



(4) the formation of an official plan of action, and (5) the transformation of the official plan in its empirical implementation."

As any other social phenomenon, a social problem is specified within its historical and cultural context, with norms, standards and what is considered normal behaviour, and with the control system of the current society in the current historical period:

*"To say that society creates its deviance and its social problems is not to say that 'it's all in the mind' and that some nasty people are going around creating deviance out of nothing, or wilfully inflating harmless conditions into social problem. But it does mean that the making of rules and sanctioning of people who break these rules are as much a part of deviance as the action itself."* (Cohen 1992: 40).

Labelling and stigmatisation theories have demonstrated the institutional impact on the development of deviance: *"stabilised deviance is in fact a product of the control system."* (Cohen 1985: 33–34). The reaction of the society has a decisive role in an individual's conceptualisation of him/herself. This is especially true in regard to so-called professionals (policemen, social workers, psychologists, pedagogues, etc. — agents of social control) (Cohen 1992: 41; see also Emerson 1969, Emerson & Messinger 1977, Heimer & Matsueda 1994, etc.).

## 2.4. Residential Control/Management of Troublesome Young People

To express the reaction to childhood troubles, different types of terminology are used: child control, management, protection, care, welfare. I use the word 'management' because I see it as the most neutral term that simply refers to dealing with young people without any special explanation of the nature of this activity. The process of dealing with young people in general contains all the three features mentioned above, the differences being in the emphasis on one or another feature from the above-mentioned notions (control, protection, care, welfare). In the Estonian context the concepts of control, influencing and protection are the most strongly emphasised. The

term 'welfare' ('heaolu') is hardly ever used even on the level of verbalised rhetoric.

Specific literature on the historical development of the residential control of children and young people persuasively shows the connections between the social reaction to the phenomenon of child exploitation (emergence of a social problem), the development of theoretical knowledge on children's needs and the elaboration of standards for a 'normal' childhood, and the process of appearance of juvenile delinquency. The appearance of juvenile delinquency, in turn, provokes further study of this phenomenon and new knowledge yields new versions of management.

Each change in the management of deviance employed new ideologies and rhetoric, but at the same time, the previous models did not disappear completely (Cohen 1985: 13–39; 40–86). However, despite the social constructionist assumption that the old models are reconstructed every time, they also go through changes every time, which can result in a totally different realisation of the same (old) model.

During the historical changes in deviance control two primary models, the model of 'justice' and the model of 'welfare', were developed (Cohen 1985, Dahl 1985, Hudson 1989, Kelly 1992, Platt 1969, Pösö 1993, Singer 1998, etc.).

The first model is based on the act of deviance and is oriented more to punishment and retribution (classicism and neo-classicism), whereas the second model focuses on the person and is treatment-oriented (positivism<sup>5</sup>). Both models assume isolation, but the procedure of isolation and the managing of an individual is different, whether this means correction or treatment. However, *"a formal treatment-oriented system of juvenile justice did not appear suddenly with the emergence of any particular legal reform. Ancient system of punishment always incorporated a vision of punishment as treatment, especially when it came to the raising of children."* (Singer 1998: 25).

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<sup>5</sup> The word 'positivism' is used as specific understanding in sociology and criminology that developed in the nineteenth century, with development of positive methods for studying the social reality (Rodwel 1998: 13–15, Taylor et al. 1985: 10–24).

The isolation of offenders and troublesome young people as the principal reaction to the juvenile deviance prevailed from the nineteenth century until the middle of the twentieth century. It was the time of the 'Great Incarcerations' (Foucault 1991) which assumed two aims: firstly, to 'cleanse' society from the elements considered dangerous, and secondly, to change the persons considered dangerous to be more in accordance to the standards; to normalise them (Foucault 1991: 182–183).

The very humanistic British Factories Act in 1833, which limited child employment, led to another process especially among the working class urban children — their marginalization and impoverishment (Wintersberger 1994 in Goldson 1997: 5). The poor, unemployed children without any working activity became visible on the streets. This is the time of appearance of juvenile delinquency, which evoked philanthropic movements in West European countries and North America to rescue and save children (Dahl 1985, Gittins 1998, Goldson 1997, Platt 1969, Qvortrup 1994, 1991, etc.). People were locked up in institutions with the aim of changing them. *"Children were prominent recipients in this process of institutionalisation. 'Depraved', 'neglected', and 'abandoned' youngsters were to be removed from the dangers of city life and the influence of bad parents."* (Dahl 1985: 32)

The first institutions for children were founded in different European countries, such as Hofwyl (1810) in Switzerland, Das Rauhe Haus (1833) in Germany, Mettray (1840), Val-d'Yvere in France and Redhill (1848) in England. These institutions operated on the basis of the common 'child-saving' philosophy of that time, which was based on the ideas of Rousseau and Enlightenment: to get to 'the root of the evil', to remove the child from the 'nest of vice', namely, from 'depraved parents' and the 'decay of city life', and bring him/her out into the country to be brought up in a Christian spirit, surrounded by nature and solid country life. Child-saving institutions worked with the belief that the agricultural work, religious education and Christian love that they provided, on which principles also the ideal model of family life was based, should invoke change in the children. (Dahl 1985: 32–34). *"The typical child-saving institutions of the Western countries featured a compromise between*



*international experience and domestic conditions — a compromise embracing three ideological elements of child-saving: love/discipline, education/religion, training/work.*" (Dahl 1985: 33). Marjatta Rahikainen (1995: 254–6) emphasises the disciplinary function of labour at Finnish reformatory schools until the time after the World War II.

The same principles of rehabilitation were also used towards adult offenders earlier (see Mathiesen 1994: 20–47).

Gittins (1998: 63) add an important interpretation to the process of development of child-saving:

*"The urge to 'rescue' and 'protect' working-class children by the middle classes can also be seen, however, as a result of fear. Children who lived and worked in the streets, in public, were regarded as 'out of control', 'wild' because they had no apparent adult supervision or control and were not dependent directly on adult protection and surveillance. The idea that children could, and can, survive in world without adult protection, without conventional (middle-class) families, defied (and defies) middle-class notions of masculinity as defined in terms of independent men who must support 'naturally dependent' women and children, and who alone are capable of instructing, guiding and controlling such weak/needy/Other beings."*

Many child-savers were originally clerical workers and acted not so much out of love for children, but above all because this kind of work for them was a way of serving the Lord. God's work was also the reason for Mary Carpenter's life's work. Mary Carpenter was one of the first and the most famous child-saver. She founded and ran the first special institution for adolescent girls — Kingswood School outside Bristol — from 1852, and ran Red Lodge from the start in 1854 until she died in 1877. The treatment of the girls was first of all directed to prepare them for future domestic work either in their own homes, or especially in the homes of 'the respectable part of society' (Dahl 1985: 38).

Mary Carpenter, an advocate of the reformatory-school idea, was a philanthropist who held explicitly anti-state views. (Dahl 1985: 43). With the rising numbers of institutions, the role of the state expanded as well. According to Dahl, the transfer of child-saving

work into the public child welfare system accompanied the process of the professionalisation of welfare work. The other outcome of this process was the beginning of official state-regulated child welfare policy. This time marked the beginning of the development of state child protection policy.

Juvenile management developed from the justice model towards the direction of treatment in accordance to the increased production of knowledge about the nature and social causes of delinquency. The new knowledge particularly concerned the social risk factors that can be found behind deviation, and the notion developed that there is no reason to wait until a child at risk commits a criminal act but to take preventative measures to prevent possible future deviant behaviour.

However, since the 1960s, in most Western European countries and North America, the notions of treatment and rehabilitation have begun to replace the ideas of punishment and retribution. This process was influenced by the publication, in the same year, of the results of major studies by Goffman (1961), Foucault (1961) and Szasz (1961) that demonstrated the real character of total institutions and the process by which total institutions 'produce/create' their inmates. As a reaction, the process of de-institutionalisation began and community control was emphasised.

Discussions about the control of delinquent children and young people are at the point where *"official rhetoric declares that incarceration is not be defined in purely welfare terms; that is, it is said to be good for the young person in question. Punishment and deterrence play no part in the official conceptualisation of the unit's purpose."* (Kelly 1992: 3, see also Wardhaugh & Wilding 1993)

The Soviet so-called pedagogical model of managing troublesome young people does not differ much in principle from the one described above. Later on in this chapter (2.4.1.2.) I make a more detailed analysis of it. However, there is reason to mention in this connection that this model also emphasised the role of study and work, whereas in place of religion there was the Soviet communist ideology, and the supportive family was replaced with a Soviet-type collective. It should also be mentioned that in the context of a totalitarian regime — which the Soviet regime was — the meaning of a state-run total institution was quite different in comparison to what

the meaning of total institutions was in a Western-type democracy. The Soviet total institution was in harmony with the general ideology of the system, which was built on the basis of violent inclusion of everybody, whereas the Western democracy is based on voluntary involvement.

In fact, there are many similarities between different approaches and models of managing troublesome young people regardless of their different basic concepts and ideology. The point of departure in all the approaches I studied is that there are factors that either disturb or are lacking in the normal socialisation of young people in trouble. It is in accordance with this basic principle that professionals working with young people base their decisions in regard to how to best attempt to restore the damage already done.

The aim is always the same, at least on the rhetorical level: to (re)socialise the young people and to integrate them into society. When the treatment model is used, this takes place by putting emphasis on ignoring the acts of a child and the reformation of the child's personality. In the justice model, the child should learn that everybody is directly responsible for their own criminal acts.

Sellick (1998: 301–310) gives an interesting overview of institutional care for children across Europe by comparing the systems and emphasising both the similarities and differences between different regions and political and economic traditions. He also observes the changes in residential care in Central and Eastern European countries in relation to the collapse of the Soviet system and the difficulties that accompanied this process.

#### **2.4.1. The Development of the Residential Management of Young People in Estonia**

In order to understand the contemporary situation of the Estonian residential management of young people, it is necessary to take a glance of the historical development of the Estonian society in general and during the last century.

The development of Estonian child and youth control and residential management can be divided into three periods that are concerned with the three historical periods of the development of the



Estonian state. The first period consists of the time of the first independent Estonian Republic (1918–1940), the second period begins with the Soviet occupation in 1940 and continues up until the restoration of independence in 1991, and the third is the period of the restoration of independent Estonia from August 1991 until today. It is characteristic to all the three periods that the understanding of youth troubles and different concepts of the management of troublesome young people vary according to the different historical situations and consequently general attitudes concerning the issue. However, the two first periods have similar characteristics with regard to the aim of the management of troubled young people: their integration into the society.

The first period could be called the time of the creation of a nation — the time of integration and national self-consciousness. This is the time of active creation of state identity. The second period is the time of passive being, subordination to the foreign power with the main aim to survive; the time of silence. The third period could be called the search for lost identity.

#### *2.4.1.1. Youth Control and Residential Management in the First Independent Estonian Republic (1918–1940)*

The history of independent Estonian Republic begins on 24 February 1918 when the independence from Russia was declared. Before that, Estonia had not been an independent state since the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Evidently, the declaration of independence was a very important event in the life of this small nation. Despite the fact that since 1710 Estonia was part of the Russian Empire, Estonians used to live side by side with Baltic Germans, who were the landowners in Baltic countries. As the most Western region of the Russian Empire and under the influence of the Lutheran church, Estonians were generally oriented towards the Western Europe in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

During the early times of the independent Estonian Republic, Russian legislation remained in effect. There were two different approaches to dealing with troubled children and young offenders depending on their institutional orientation. One approach had the

child protection system of the establishment of Estonian state as the point of departure, and the other functioned from the perspective of the Estonian juvenile penal system. In 1918, the Ministry of Work and Welfare was established, which dealt with problems concerning those mothers and children who had lost the provider of the family (fathers) in the war, as well as children orphaned for other reasons. The Ministry of Education and Social Affairs was established in 1929. Other Estonian organisations such as Child Protection, Red Cross, and the Association of Children's Friends also did work with problems concerning children. (Tulva 1996: 5)

In 1932, a publication by the Estonian State Welfare Organisation was presented which summarised the problems and work in the field of Estonian child protection. The publication included papers that were presented on three one-day seminars on child protection that were organised in Estonia in 1927, 1929, and 1931. Among the articles, there were many that concerned with questions of troubled children, juvenile offenders, and difficulties in bringing up and educating children (Busch 1932: 7–11, Schlieffstein 1932: 11–8, Aumann 1932: 23–30, Ostra-Oinas 1932: 20–3). The general conclusion of these reports was that troubled children should be isolated from other, 'normal' children and the task to raise them should be given to professionals trained particularly for this work (Teine... 1932).

In the first Estonian Republic, children with different disabilities received special attention in connection with the general national health programs. The Estonian Law on Welfare was passed 19 June 1925. The law included a special chapter dedicated to the problem of "damaged, delinquent (*kurikalduvus* — a person with evil tendencies), blind, deaf-mute and imbecile (*idiots*) children" (Riigi Teataja (state information) R.T. nr 80, 120/121: 817–824). So-called welfare schools (*hoolekannekool*), with the aim "to correct, and prepare delinquent youngsters for honest work" had existed in Estonia since 1923. The welfare schools were closed, single sex institutions which provided primary education. Children also received training for manual work, and the aim of such school was to give vocational skills for a life of honest work. The Ministry of Work and Welfare had the legal right to send a child against his/her will to a boarding school if there was no other option for the child to receive the necessary edu-

cation. In the first Estonian Republic the health and 'normality' of the population was of particular focus. Section 88 of the Welfare Law mandated that physicians and midwives who detected any defects in young children should inform the local government of the fact, and that the local authorities must report any children with 'defects' in their area to the Ministry of Work and Welfare.

The Koluvere home for bringing up boys and young men was one such institution (Saar 1988: 44). Koluvere was founded in 1924 and had 38 residential places in the beginning. The number of residents grew rapidly, and reached an average of 70. The residents were sent to the institution from ordinary schools. The reasons for transfer were school truancy, running away from home and petty larceny. As a rule, children spent time in Koluvere until they reached 16 years of age. The children completed 6 years of grade school, and vocational training had special importance. One of the former teachers and a one-time headmaster of the Koluvere institution wrote in his memoirs that between 1930 and 1949, three teachers who were also educators worked in the institution. All the staff lived on the premises of the Koluvere palace (castle). The total number of personnel, including vocational instructors and ancillary staff was less than 20 persons. There is not much reliable data available on the results of the educational work. What is known for a fact is that in 1928 the behaviour of the residents was assessed in the following way: 10 were graded as good, 23 as acceptable and 28 as bad (ibid. 1988: 46-7).

The first approach to managing troubled young people functioned from the perspective of the state child protection system, whereas the second was tied to the penal system and dealt with young offenders who had already broken the law. However, on 22 April 1919 the Temporary Government of Estonia made a decision to open a correctional house for delinquent boys in Harku county barracks (R.T. 1919: 229). The temporary establishment document of the Harku colony was published 4 June 1919 in state information bulletin. The document was revised and finally passed in 1923.

The residents of the colony were boys of 8-15 years of age who were either punished by a court order or were under preliminary court observation. The residents could stay at the institution until they were 17 years of age. The objectives of the Harku colony were



similar to those in Western Europe reformatories. The primary aim was to isolate the young people from the negative influence of adult criminals, and through work and study provide them with the opportunity to fulfil their needs as children as regulated in the legislation.

Thanks to the writings of Hans Madisson (1927, 1924) we have the possibility to know more about how the Harku institution operated. Madisson was a physician who medically tested the Harku residents and conducted several studies about them in the 1920s and 1930s. His research work was influenced by biological criminology and eugenics. Madisson's aim was to clarify the causes of the residents' delinquency from a biological point of view. He took different measurements of the boys in order to find evidence of whether a resident's delinquency was hereditary by nature or caused by other reasons. Madisson wrote several books and articles about juvenile delinquency, which included his doctoral dissertation.

The residents of the Harku colony were divided into groups called 'families' according to both their academic level and their behaviour. In 1923 there were six 'regular' families, a guard family for new residents, and a penal family for those boys who broke the rules of the Harku colony. Each family was assigned a teacher/educator and one assistant staff member whose responsibility it was to supervise the residents' conduct and activities. The residents were under supervision around the clock.

Being released from the Harku colony depended on the conduct of the resident in question. There were certain preconditions for this to happen. The institution had a hierarchy of 'levels' (degrees) from zero to five which a boy could climb up. Good behaviour granted a boy merits (cheques), and he could rise to a higher level after collecting a certain amount of merits.

To leave the colony, the resident had to have reached the fifth and highest level. For one merit (cheque) the resident had to behave well and study and work hard for one week. When a boy had collected 10 cheques, he had the possibility to transfer to the next level, if the pedagogic council of Harku so recommended. Hence, ten weeks of good behaviour was needed to reach the next level, and the minimum time of residence in Harku in a case of excellent behaviour without exception was 50 weeks.

Work was an important activity for the residents (compare with data concerning reform schools in Finland in Rahikainen 1995). The boys worked for money, of which 40% went to the Harku colony and 60% was put aside for the boy to receive at the time of leaving the institution.

The colony was led by a director who was named by the Minister of Justice according to a proposal made by the main administrator of prisons. The director was assisted by the headmaster of the school activities, the manager of work activities and the manager of finance. The main administrator of the prison system also appointed all teachers and educators of Harku, and the rest of the staff was hired by the director of the institution. The Harku colony had its own pedagogical council chaired by the director which consisted of teachers, educators and the physician of the institution. All personnel had to live on colony premises.

The decisions about the reception and release of the residents were made by a commission of the main administration of prisons. The commission consisted of the superintendent of the Harju county council and representatives of child protection associations, the Ministry of Work and Welfare, the Ministry of Education and prosecution, as well as the main administrator of prisons and the general physician of prisons, altogether seven members. The director of the Harku colony had an advisory role. All the facts mentioned above clearly demonstrate that the Harku colony was a correctional institution with a clear punishing function.

The institution offered six years of grammar school education and training in the workshops. The residents had the possibility to receive vocational training of a carpenter, smith, tailor, shoemaker, or bookbinder. There was also an agricultural area for gardening.

The residents' contacts with their families were limited, and depended on their behaviour. Correspondence with home was also limited and under the censorship of the director.

Similarly to other Western European countries, the main activities in the Harku colony were directed towards school education, work and discipline. In 1930, the regulations concerning the colony were revised and a new approach was imposed on the colony management which focused on more individual treatment of residents. Despite his eugenic and medical approach, Madisson (1927, 1924)

gives an interesting critical description of this first Estonian reformatory. In his criticism, he pointed out that all residents regardless of the nature of their difficulties or offences were managed as a group rather than on an individual basis, that the institution had a weak management system and that the rehabilitative work was disturbed by conflicts among the staff members.

In 1945, the Harku colony was merged with the Koluvere welfare school. The new institution was reorganised in 1964 along with the 1960's trend of founding special vocational schools for troubled young people (this is explained in more detail in subchapter: 2.4.1.2.).

Some young people of 10–17 years of age who were sentenced to isolation from society by the criminal justice system but were not sent into Harku colony had to serve their sentence within the general prison system among adult offenders.

There was not a similar type of a separate institution for the imprisonment for adolescent girls. They had to serve their sentence in the general women's prison, or in women's section of a general prison. Young people in general prisons were given additional nourishment (0.5 l. milk, 200 gr. fish and 20 gr. sugar daily), and they were separated from adults if there were sufficient facilities to do so, but the daily regime was the same for all prisoners regardless of their age (R.T. 1926 nr. 59: 744–5).

Hence, it can be said that there were some alternatives for managing and controlling juvenile delinquency in the first independent Estonian state. Children and young people with 'small defects' were sent to study in welfare schools. Young people who committed more serious offences were prosecuted in the youth court, and boys and young men under the age of 18 were sent either to the Harku colony or general prisons to serve their sentences. The only option for young girl offenders was to send them to serve their sentences into a women's prison. In his doctoral dissertation thesis, H. Madisson writes about the need to found a special institution also for female young offenders, but as he also points out, there were only a few cases (less than 10 girls) per year.



#### 2.4.1.2. *The Soviet Management of Troubled Young People (1945–1991)*

After the occupation of the Estonian Republic (first on 21 July 1940 then after the end of World War II on May 1945) by the Soviet Union, Soviet laws also came into force. According to the 1961 Penal Code of the Estonian SSR, section 61.1 on juvenile delinquency, it was possible to apply other methods of managing youth offenders than criminal punishment, providing that the court in question found that appropriate. Such methods were primarily

- direction to an educational colony (p.1)
- direction to a special educational institution for children and young people (p.2)
- referral to a special health and educational institution for children and young people (p.3).

Before ordering a child to be sent to one of the institutions described above, the court took into consideration the child offender's personality, the social implications and severity of the offence, and circumstances of offence. On the basis of the same section of penal code, point 4, the court also had the option of ordering a juvenile offender to be put under social, pedagogical or family supervision, or even medical supervision, instead of sending him/her to an institution. These forms of control could also be applied to a child after he/she was released from an institution.

However, there was also a practice at use that according to the criminal process code, sections 96 and 168, the courts could assign cases of minors to be handled by a juvenile committee during the preliminary investigation of the offences. These committees investigated the cases, and could order the child in question to be sent to a special educational institution (Ginter *et al.* 2000: 11–2).

This procedure, that is, the assignation of cases of juveniles by court to the juvenile committees became a general rule. In 1963, for example, 69% of all offences committed by minors were assigned to juvenile committees, so that only one of every three juvenile criminal offences was handled in a criminal court (Saarsoo 1995: 428).

In 1960s, special vocational schools for troublesome children and young people were founded within the general educational system.

In the regulation concerning these institutions, their task was defined as:

*"Special vocational schools are state educational institutions for minors who are difficult to bring up (raskestikasvatata), and whose re-education should take place under special conditions with a strict pedagogical regime."* (Saar 1988: 48).

Ordering a child to be sent to a special vocational school was considered the ultimate method that a juvenile commission could use. The reasons for taking such strong measures were either such a serious criminal offence that was considered dangerous to society, or systematic lawbreaking. Three separate incidents of breaking the rules was generally seen to be systematic. Offences considered dangerous to society were similar to criminal offences, but could not be categorised as a crime *per se* because of the offender's age. This means that in the Soviet legislation, the age of offenders played a decisive role. The aim was to save young people under 18 years of age from being put through the criminal court system and manage their cases through juvenile commissions, which were public organisations.

In assessing the Soviet system of dealing with juvenile delinquents, Ginter points out two moments: on the one hand it was good that children could step into adult life without a criminal past, whereas from the viewpoint of the constitutional state it was reprehensible that a public organisation, rather than the judicial system, had the power to implement such severe punishment as loss of freedom on minors (Ginter *et al.* 2000: 12). The strict pedagogical control of troubled young people characteristic to the Soviet system was not categorised as a limitation of freedom in the same sense it could be understood where adults are concerned. The basic notion was that because children are dependent on adults and as such need control imposed upon them, isolation from society could and should be perceived as belonging to the category of problem-solving methods rather than a punishment. However, this notion is an abstract ideal and does not mean that in reality young people who were sent into a closed institution did not experience this first and foremost as a punishment.

The official Soviet rhetoric of residential management was based on the idea that deviant and criminal behaviour was opposed to the

Soviet lifestyle. The complete elimination of all crime was only a question of time. *"There is nothing in the nature of the socialist order which generate crime, ... because the general causes of crime are liquidated,"* writes Kimmel, the vice council for the prosecution of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1966 in the introduction to a textbook *"About the juvenile crime and its prevention"*. True, crime still existed, but this was because *"besides general causes, there are numerous other secondary causes and circumstances, which promote the preservation and even dispersal of crime."* (Kimmel 1966: 6, my emphasis). These secondary causes were, for instance, such that *"... in the consciousness of some of our citizens, the society of anti-humanistic ideology of exploitation and of old morality still remains. Under the influence of such survivals of the past in the consciousness of a person, he/she can develop a criminal attitude, which in favourable conditions may be realised in the form of committing of a concrete offence. ... Consequently, the recognition and elimination of the causes of the preservation, diffusion and lust for such survivals ... is the precondition for the liquidation of crime."* (Kimmel 1966: 11). In the case of eliminating juvenile deviance, it is *"extremely important to separate the offender in time from the milieu which promotes deviation both in mentality (psyche) and behaviour. Here is the need to isolate the youngsters who committed danger acts and place them into a colony of a special regime, or even into a work colony for minors."* (Kimmel 1966: 21)

An article was published in the same book by Helgi Kurm concerning the research results of the direction of the development of the lives of troubled adolescent girls in Estonia during the time (Kurm 1966: 35-44). The main attention is paid to the family background of the girls in the study, and the author comes to the following conclusion: *"There is a need to quickly open a special educational institution for troubled adolescent girls. As long as we have no such institution, we cannot isolate them from society and, consequently, it is inevitable that they have the bad influence on other children; and as it is, we can not even speak about their own education."* (43)

Beside causes such as the bad influence of bad people who still survived from the "old" capitalist time, another cause for juvenile



deviance and crime is the low level of personal development. So, it seemed to be important in the management of troubled young people to elevate their cultural level through education and pedagogical influencing. In place of bad influence by bad people, the young people had to be influenced by culturally high-level pedagogues who would teach and educate them. An educated person understands that to break the law is wrong. Hence, young offenders should be dealt with by isolating them from their environment, and replacing the bad influence it represents with the 'right kind' of influence. Through schooling and vocational education, it is possible to either have a strong enough influence on the young people or to force them to correct their mind and behaviour. (Minkovski 1966, Rebane 1966, 1968 etc.).

In short, the Soviet management of troubled young people was based on the Soviet pedagogical ideology and state paternalism. The educational model was developed by Makarenko in the Soviet era (special schools belong to the system of education). In that time there was a deep belief, which exists even today, that prevention of deviation is a question of education. On the rhetorical level, the Soviet model was based on the Marxist idea that society (environment) creates the personality. However, because the Soviet society in general was good, lacking any cause for deviation, the reasons for deviant behaviour were explained only as a negative influence of either the family or the close environment (friends, acquaintances) of the adolescent. As a result of constant negative influences on a youngster, they may develop negative personality traits. This negative personality should be reformed and the negative environment replaced. That is why the young people should be separated from their 'bad' environment and put into the 'right' environment.

The 'right' environment was the Soviet collective. Thus, the main idea of this model is that study, work, pedagogical treatment and the influence of the '(Soviet) collective' were the keys for changing a deviant adolescent.

In fact, this model was based on strict control and disciplinary power. The child/adolescent had to be subordinated to the control of collective and pedagogical influence. It is well known that the Soviet system did not support informal (natural) human relations based on solidarity, and thus the Soviet collective as a notion was

not identical with natural friendships, but assumed some official organisation and control by the party state. The members of a collective should control each other. Even the word 'collective' as it was used in the Soviet context was tied to an official status. It was possible to speak about a working collective, which united colleagues; a form collective, which united pupils of the same year class in a school, but nobody could speak about a collective of friends or a family. Thus, the idea of a collective was based on formal relations.

A state institution for delinquent youth that functioned according to controlled regulations was seen as the best and the only possibility. The aim of youth management was to change the adolescent through implanting Soviet values in him/her in order to create a conformist for the Soviet state. This kind of implanting loyalty to the Soviet state and the Communist party was also the main aim of education. This is the reason that despite the rhetoric of collective, there was in fact no collective solidarity between people. On the contrary, the people in one collective could actually be the primary threat to their comrades, because anyone had the possibility to control and also to report on the activities and thoughts of others. This is where the roots of distrust and the impossibility of real co-operation between people lay.

Nobody was interested in the development of informal relationships between people. On the contrary, informal relations posed a danger to the Soviet state because of their nature of being beyond control. The aim of managing deviant children was not to return them to their families, but rather to deal with them directly as isolated individuals.

After an adolescent had finished his/her education in a special vocational school, the state took care to find him/her employment and housing. That everyone had to have a work place was a well-known characteristic of the Soviet system. The objective was to keep people under control and to make sure they remained within the disciplinary hierarchy. Evidently, during the 50 years of the Soviet regime in Estonia, some changes took place in the functioning of the system. The changes mostly concerned people's disillusionment with the ideology, but the general rhetoric in principle did not change.

### 2.4.1.3. Juvenile Control in the Restored Estonian Republic (after August 1991)

After the restoration of the independence of the Estonian republic, the Estonian society can be characterised as steering towards two main directions of orientation: firstly, back to the distant past, namely, the era of the first Estonian Republic; and secondly, towards the Western world. Even though there was a gap between the two orientations, they had one thing in common: a strong disdain for the Soviet past and a rejection of the Soviet system, practises, lifestyle and experiences.

The new penal code that came into force in 1992 abolished section 51, which mandated that a minor was to be released from criminal responsibility, and required the juvenile commissions to investigate and make decisions on the criminal offences of minors. The text of section 61 was also changed, and the section 8 of the criminal justice code that regulated the assignation of cases to the juvenile committees was omitted. According to sections 10, p.1. and 61 of penal code that regulated the application of educational methods to manage juvenile offenders, the offence should be in the third degree. On 10 February 1994, penal code section 10 was changed to include all juvenile offenders despite of the degree of their offence.

The juvenile commissions of the Soviet era were abolished, but the problem was that there was nothing to replace them with. It became necessary to work out a new system of legislation concerning young offenders. Three already existing models that were in use in European countries — the German model, the Swedish model and the Swiss model — were discussed, and the question was which one to choose as the basis for the new Estonian model. The German model of a juvenile justice system required creating a new, independent criminal justice system for juvenile crime, and assumed two separate dogmatic bases for general and juvenile justice systems.

Another alternative, the so-called Swedish model, assumed a single common dogmatic basis with separate practices for adult and minor offenders. However, using the Swedish model would have in essence meant the preservation of the Soviet system, which had its basis on theories of special prevention of punishment and using re-educational methods of justice (Ginter *et al.* 2000: 13).



At the time, the needed reform of the general justice system was in the process of preparation, though the content of this new general justice reform was not clarified yet. A project concerning the criminal legislation was conducted by professor Ilmar Rebane, but it was strongly criticised because of its Soviet influence. Chapter 9 of Rebane's project report dealt with juvenile offenders (sections 70–80). According to this project, the following penal methods could be applied to young people of 15–17 years of age: a fine, community service work, arrest, and detention. The court could also apply such non-punitive methods as counselling, mediation or placement in a welfare, special health or special educational institution.

Rebane's project provided a basis for the adaptation of the third, the Swiss model, into the Estonian system. The point of departure of this model was to outline a new law that would particularly regulate the methods of managing juvenile offenders that were not included in the criminal and administrative justice system. (*ibid.*: 14).

The first attempt to reform the law concerning young offenders took the German model as its basis, but the project was rejected in 1995 by the State Crime Prevention Council of Estonia.

The second conception was to create seats for special juvenile judges within the general court system, and later on to generate a separate juvenile court on this basis. The judges with expertise on matters concerning juveniles were to handle the cases of offenders of 10–17 years of age, and to have the right to impose sanction in regard to, for instance, their education. This conception was initially accepted by the State Crime Prevention Council of Estonia 11 September 1995. However, after a long debate the idea to create a new institution of juvenile court was also rejected.

The third conception was to create a special committee by local governments that would handle the cases of young offenders and apply different non-punitive sanctions on them. The most severe sanction — ordering a child to be sent into a special educational institution — could only be implemented on verification by the local court in question. All cases of juvenile offenders (except those that could be solved either in the general administrative or criminal court system) were to be discussed in these juvenile committees. The system had a resemblance to the Swedish model. However, the system was based on the actual penal code. Presently, a new penal system is

under construction in Estonia. It includes radical reforms in criminal legislation. (*ibid.*: 15)

Because of all the above-mentioned attempts to reorganise the justice system, the special schools for delinquent youth worked without any legal basis. There was a contradiction between the Constitution of Estonian Republic where it is stated that detention could only be ordered on the basis of a court decision and the fact that there was no organ with the juridical power to make decisions on sending minors to the special schools, which meant suspending their personal freedom. As a temporary measure, the Ministry of Education's made the decision to found a special commission that was given the jurisdiction to order a young person to be sent to an educational institution. The commission's decisions to order children to special schools were justified by their problems in school. The decisions were made on the basis of the Law on Basic and Secondary Education section 2, p. 1,2; section 21, p. 2. (R.T.I 1993). However, because the same law states that the parents of a child bear the responsibility on both their education and the choice of school, parental permission was also needed to order a child to be sent away (section 17, p. 7; section 18, 21, p. 3.3(2)). During the Soviet time parental consent was not necessary. (Saar 1988: 48).

The new Juvenile Sanctions Act came into force in September of 1998 and regulates the management of troublesome young people. According of the law special, local governments must appoint special youth committees whose task it is to handle the cases of troubled young people and find solutions for their problems. The committees have a system of nine different sanctions from mild to severe which they can prescribe on young people to change their behaviour. The most severe of the methods, ordering a child to be sent to a special school, can only be applied after a petition to and the verification of the local court. About the details of this procedure, see chapter 4.1.2.

At the moment, there are three special schools for troubled young people in Estonia: two for adolescent boys — one for those with Russian origin and one for mainstream Estonian boys — and one for adolescent girls. The institution for girls is the place of my research: the K. School.

In the following pages I attempt to reconstruct the everyday operation of the one of the three institutions, the K. School. I have divided the task into three dimensions. Firstly, I reconstruct the physical space of the school and analyse its significance in regard to the social activities of the institution. Secondly, I reconstruct the main social actors (the residents and the staff), and thirdly, I reconstruct the social activities at the institution.



### 3. K. AS A NOTION: Institution and Village

"... Even buildings, clothes and consumer goods, to the extent that human beings imbue them with social meanings, can be 'read' as text and can be analysed to discover the discourses operating within those texts." (Burr 1997: 141-2)

In ethnographic research, *"there are three major dimensions along which sampling within cases occurs: time, people, and context."* (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983: 46) I begin with the last one: context. In this chapter, I attempt to describe the space where the education and bringing up of the troubled girls of the K. School took place, but first I would like to emphasize the importance of the following points with the words of Hammersley and Atkinson:

*"Taking account of variations in context is as important as sampling across people. Within any setting people may distinguish between a number of quite different contexts that require different kind of behaviour. ... This contrast is an example of a more abstract distinction between frontstage and backstage regions developed by Goffman" (1959: 114-15, in Hammersley & Atkinson 1983: 51).*

Keeping these words in mind, I must point out that my research material is a representation mostly of one context only, the K. School itself, and the roles that are relevant in that. Another point that is very important to make is that

*"...we must identify the contexts in terms of which people in the setting act, recognising that these are social constructions not physical locations, and try to ensure that we sample across all those that are relevant." (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983: 52).*

The description applies to the time I completed my fieldwork at the institution. I make the point because certain circumstances at the school that were described as being problematic may be resolved by now, such as problems concerning the sanitary conditions of the school.

### 3.1. Reconstruction of the Stage

The description of space is important for two reasons. Firstly, space is produced by human activity, and hence tells a lot about this activity. Secondly, the same space may have different meanings for different actors at different times, depending on the relationship between the person and the space. The particular meaning which is attributed by different actors to the physical space helps to understand the effect of activity on a particular actor. In the following, I portray the space of the K. School as I found it during my field work, and then try to reconstruct the meaning of this space to other actors: the residents, mid-level staff and managers.

#### 3.1.1. The Village

The village K. is well known in Estonia as the location of the institution. The school stands in the middle of the village, which is situated in Southern Estonia about 15 km away from a relatively large town. In 1997, the population of the village was 278, which was 45 people less than in 1993 (323). The village has a higher ratio of women than men.

The village community creates a complete world of its own around the special school. Its development began when the institution was first opened on 1 October 1965. The school provided housing for its staff members for as long as they worked at the institution. As a consequence, the institution and the village form a peculiar whole: all the inhabitants of the village are somehow (directly or through their family) related to the school.

A student of special pedagogy who did her practical studies at the special school at the same time I was doing my field work there,

characterised her feelings about the institution and its environment: *"This village, this K. is itself a closed world."*

I had very similar feelings about the place, partly perhaps it is situated in a remote part of Estonia and is hard to both reach and leave. Only three buses a day drove through the village, one in the morning, one around noon, and one in the evening. Another bus route passed the village three kilometres away on a highway. One has to plan trips in and out of the village carefully and in good time, and even then the bus does not always show up on schedule. If people miss the bus, they may choose to hitch-hike or even walk the fifteen kilometres to the town. Once I ended up walking the entire way because I was late for the bus and no car would pick me up. On weekends the transport situation is even harder. There are fewer buses and other traffic. Hence, without a car of one's own travelling to K. could be quite a problem, as the student I mentioned above described:

*"I was always afraid of being late for work. Quite often it happened that I missed the bus, and had to hitch-hike. ... Once I came to the school by taxi. It was quite expensive. I calculated that with the monthly salary I earned at the school I could take a taxi four times... I was a part-time educator and had to come to the school exactly four times a month."* (I.19.T.a.)

There are different ways for the residents to travel to the school. When they come for the first time, they can be taken by car accompanied either by an authority (a youth police inspector, child-protection worker, or a children's home educator if the resident lives in a children's home) or their parents, and some girls even come alone by bus. Every case is individual and depends on the particular girl and her situation. (In more detail, see chapters 4.1.2. and 5.1.).

When one comes to the village, the first thing he/she sees is an empty building near the road<sup>6</sup>. (There are also some other abandoned buildings in K.). In front of the building, there are bushes and behind them, a dog on the chain who salutes all strangers by barking. The K. School can be seen on the right hand side behind the empty

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<sup>6</sup> I learned later that the building was used as an accommodation for the teachers and other staff of the first educational institutions in the village.



building. The school building is a former manor house that was destroyed in the summer of 1941 during the war. The house was completely rebuilt in 1956–1957 on the foundation of the former manor house. Between 1957 and 1965, the premises were used as a children's home, then an industrial school, and after that a boarding school.

On the left hand side of the empty building, a stadium can be seen — a big field overgrown by grass surrounded by a fence that is broken here and there. A little farther away there is a group of blocks of flats, where most of the staff of the K. School live. The blocks of flats were built in the 1960s and 1970s and they express the style of typical Soviet village architecture — a town-type dwelling zone, which were built everywhere in Estonia of the 1970s and 1980s. The buildings were three stores high. The village's only shop and the post office were situated in one of the buildings. The shop was small with only one shop assistant working there, and if she happened to be sick, the shop was closed. Once during the time I spent at the village the shop was closed for two weeks. Goods to the village shop were delivered once a week, on Wednesdays. The shop only carried a small selection of everyday necessities, and on Wednesday afternoons after the delivery there were long lines of people queuing for their shopping. In April, the shop was renovated to be bigger, nicer and more modern.

The next shopping place was three kilometres away, near the highway. Once a week, on Thursdays, a small shop was open at the K. School — but only for the personnel. At first, I thought that the shop was for the residents' use, but soon learned that shopping was completely prohibited to the residents. If they wanted to buy something with their own personal money that was handled by an educator, they had to ask the educator to make the purchase.

There are some private houses in K. as well, but they are few and far between from the centre of the village and do not form a complex. K. is a typical village built during the Soviet time, and is very different from traditional Estonian rural villages and farm land.

When, during an interview, I asked an old K. village inhabitant what she would consider to be the most important characteristic of the village, she told me a long story about the village's past as a home for educational institutions. The first village school had been

founded already in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. She attributed a special role to the K. School, which to her was first and foremost an educational institution.

### 3.1.2. The Institution

First I have to explain the reason why I choose to call the institution by the name of the K. Special School. I did not want to use the real name of institution, even though the school is easily identifiable in Estonia because there is only one such institution. Moreover, I use lot of documents as references (such as newspaper articles, television broadcasts and Internet address), in which the real name of the institution appears. Nevertheless, I prefer to use this altered name especially because of the allusion to Franz Kafka whose novels I thought of very often during my field work.

The school was opened as a special vocational school for young female offenders. It was the only such institution for Estonia and Latvia. The school provided secondary education, which was obligatory in the Soviet Union, as well as vocational education. The residents could acquire a qualification in the occupations of a dress-maker, knitter or gardener. There were three official objectives: to teach the pupils according to the curriculum of ordinary secondary education, to instruct them in vocational skills, and to provide them with a stable upbringing.

The youths were sent to the institution by juvenile committees, which were staffed by the local Soviets. After completing the program of the institution, which, as a rule, meant the attainment of a secondary school diploma, young women were sent to a particular workplace, where the work collectives would supervise and support them. The age range of residents was 14 to 18 years.

In 1990 the school was reorganised as the K. Special School, which now provides compulsory primary education according to the Law on Primary and Secondary Education of the Estonian Republic. According to the law, all children have to attend school until seventeen years of age or until the completion of their primary education (nine years at school). The residents of the K. School have ten hours of vocational training per week, but they no longer have the possi-

bility to acquire a vocational diploma. The age range of residents in 1997 was ten to seventeen years of age. The average stay at the institution was two years, which has remained the same since the school was reorganised.

The K. Special School is an institution that officially belongs to the Estonian state educational system, thus it is subordinate to the Ministry of Education. As long as there was not a specific law that regulated the functioning of the institution (between 1991–1999), decisions about the sending a youngster into a special educational institution were made by a special commission appointed by the Ministry of Education. However, at that time, children and young people were sent into closed institutions without a court order. In essence, this means that such institutions functioned on a quasi-legal basis. The institutions were financed by an appropriation in the state budget, but there was no statute to regulate the funding. The new statute on the K. Special School was confirmed by the Minister of Education on 25 February 1999.

During a period of seven years from 1991 to 1999, the official status of the institution was tied to the Soviet system of the management of troubled young people developed by Makarenko. He put priority on pedagogical methods in the process of reforming the personalities of troublesome young people. At the time when the K. School was opened, the management of troubled young people consisted of three parts: control, care and pedagogical re-education. (The juvenile justice system in the restored Estonian Republic was discussed more in detail in chapter 2.4.1.3.)

### *3.1.2.1. The School Building*

The K. Special School is surrounded by a high wooden fence. During the day, the gate is wide open. The open gate and the broken fence have a symbolic meaning, which I came to know soon after I arrived at the institution. The managers and other staff members repeatedly pointed out that the school is not such a totally closed institution now as it was during the Soviet era, and this is particularly demonstrated by the open gate. The open gate could be perceived as a metaphor of the openness of the institution. The gate is closed at



night and also when the girls had violated the regime of the special school in some serious way. For example, once money was stolen from the kitchen staff and nobody confessed as being culpable. The managing staff declared that the school would remain closed until the money was returned. The gate was closed and the residents could not leave the premises of the institution even escorted by staff members. Hence, the open-closed gate is a peculiar method of disciplining the residents, as well as a peculiar method of demonstrating the staff's powers. However, this kind of demonstration of power was not always very effective; the gate remained closed for two days but was opened again even though the money was never returned.

A gate that can be either open or closed is more of an ideological device. The staff wants to demonstrate its good will towards residents by allowing more freedom, and if the gate is closed it signifies that the girls are unworthy of the trust. In fact whether the gate is closed or not has no real meaning for the residents, because they are at all times kept behind locked doors and under the control of the staff. The doors of the dormitory are locked, the doors of the school are locked and the door near the dining room is locked. The residents can only leave the main building or the premises escorted by a member of the teaching staff or other personnel, or with a special permit by the headmistress. In a peculiar way, the open gate in fact limits the free living space of the residents in the sense that when the gate is closed, the residents could use the yard more freely. On the other hand, if someone really wants to run away, it is possible at any time — as the fence is full of holes.

However, the open gate has an important symbolic function for the girls. It seemed to be important to the residents to see the open gate from their windows. When the gate was closed, it raised fear and nervousness among them. The reason for this is probably the fact that the open-closed gate demonstrates the present stage of the relationship between the staff and the residents. The girls become nervous seeing the gate closed because it demonstrates the staff's discontent with the residents, and this also means that the girls' access to other facilities is limited.

Whatever the real situation is seen to be, the open gate symbolises both the will to appear more open and the accessibility of the

institution to the community/society. The public appearances of the school, such as television broadcasts, newspaper interviews of the managing staff and the Internet home page, speak for this will as well — and so does the open gate itself.

### 3.1.2.2. *The Living Space and Living Conditions at the Institution*

The living space of the institution is divided into four parts, which are associated with three types of activity: the school for primary education, the workshop for vocational training, the dormitory for sleeping and spending free time, and the premises surrounding the school for walks escorted by a staff member. However, as a rule the residents are rarely taken for walks — if at all — due to the lack of both time and any real motivation by the staff members to do so. Walks also provide the residents with ample opportunity to escape from the school during these walks, and this naturally presents extra responsibilities and a possible risk for the staff members.

In official documents of the institution there are the following description of the institution's premises and buildings:

*"The premises consist of 38.3 hectares of land, including four buildings, a garden and a sports field. Part of the premises is at the disposal of a subsidiary farm, which produces some of the food consumed at the school.*

*The buildings:*

- 1. The main building — a three-storied, former manor house, where the administration rooms, the dining room, the hall and the bursary rooms are located. On the left flank of the building there are classrooms, the staff room and secondary rooms. On the right flank there is the dormitory with its washrooms, the educators' rooms and a school 'clinic' consisting of a surgery, an area for procedures with dental and gynaecological facilities, a physiotherapy room, and two in-patient wards with six and four beds in them respectively, and washrooms.*
- 2. The production building — a single-storey building linked to the main building by a corridor. Here the workrooms,*

*and classrooms with sewing machines and looms are to be found.*

3. *The gymnasium, and its changing rooms and washing areas.*
4. *The accommodation area — a single-storey building, housing the workers' own rooms, an office and storerooms."*

It is interesting that this description does not mention the penalty rooms. There were two of these at the institution: on the first floor of the main building, in the out-patient section there is one called 'isolation' with a window made of special glass through which the room's occupant can not see, and the other in a separate building by the gate without any window at all. There is no other furniture in these rooms, and the resident ordered to confinement is given only a mattress and a blanket to sleep with. For toilet needs, the girl is given a chamber pot which she must empty herself. When I asked the residents what is the most difficult thing in K., they told me repeatedly that this is the most humiliating thing in the whole punishment. The maximum time for isolation was three days.

The exterior of the main building did not look all that nice from the front, but from the back it gives an even more depressing impression. There once used to be a terrace which is now totally ruined with steps overgrown with weeds and moss. The remains of the terrace railings are broken and falling apart. In the words of a Ministry of Education expert on special schools in Estonia during a meeting regarding another project connected to special education in Estonia, "*K. has a withered appearance*" — (It was a project carried out by special pedagogues in which I was invited to participate (Kõrgesaar 1999).

A quite large area of land behind the main building, perhaps best defined as a garden, is empty and unused. Behind the garden flows a big river. Here and there are heaps of rubbish. The gives a similar impression of abandonment and disuse as the school stadium described earlier.



### 3.1.2.3. *The Dormitory*

The residents live on the first two floors on the right part of the main building, which form the dormitory of the school. The first floor is reserved for girls who are in the ninth, or final, form, and the rest of the girls occupy the second floor.

Looking in from the entrance of the second floor, there were two long corridors. One opened straight ahead and the other to the right hand side. Near the entrance was an armchair and a table with a lamp and some books laying on top. The books were for the night watch(wo)man to keep records on the girls, such as information about missing girls, marks of who stayed at the in-patient ward of the clinic or was ordered to isolation in the penalty rooms, who was visiting at home, who had changed to another bedroom, the names of new residents, the names of girls who needed to be woken up at night because of bed-wetting, or who had kitchen duty the next day and had to get up early. The books often disappeared or were torn. Sometimes there were just sheets of paper with the necessary information scribbled on them. The table was accessible to residents.

This was the place where the educator on duty and the night monitor spent their time. It provided a full view of the corridors.

Over the entrance door there was a bell which announced the times of all the daily activities for the residents. The residents woke up to the sound of the bell, they went to breakfast to the sound of the bell, they went to their school classes to the sound of the bell and so forth for the entire day. The bell has a very loud and unpleasant sound. I was constantly startled by this unexpected and sharp sound, especially in the beginning.

There was also a little room for the educators' use near the entrance of the second floor. However, it was not easily accessible. Only a few educators had the key to the room, and an additional problem was that even their keys did not always work because the lock was often broken. I always had to ask one of the girls to come and open the door for me, and they were quite crafty at this task.

There was the toilet in front of the educators' room. The wash room was around the corner. The girls' bedrooms were in rows along the corridor.

The toilets form a special area in the institutional space strongly connected to the privacy of the residents. Eräsaari (1994) points out the significance of a study of the use of specifically institutional spaces to clarify the relationship between staff and clients. She emphasises that in official places which people visit for specific purposes, staff and clients use separate toilet rooms. In the case of closed institutions, the relationship between the staff and the residents becomes even more pronounced with regard to how sanitary facilities are arranged. In the K. School, the residents' toilets could not be closed from inside. The staff was free to enter any time they wished. The practice was explained by the general rule of the girls being under total supervision; meaning 24 hours a day. However, despite the fact that most educators entered the toilets randomly and without warning, the residents used the toilets for different kinds of prohibited activity. Toilets were the places for smoking cigarettes and the settling of scores and relationships with other girls.

On the first floor there were ten bedrooms, while on the second floor there were nineteen. Each bedroom housed between two and four girls depending on its size. One room was larger than others and shared by six girls. There was also one single room.

The bedroom doors had glass windows. Earlier, it was not allowed to cover the glass and the staff was able to visually control what happened in the rooms from the corridor, but now the girls hang up towels to ensure their privacy. However, the doors can not be locked and the staff on duty can enter the bedrooms whenever they wish to do so. When the girls are nervous for one reason or another, they break the glass windows time to time.

The names of the girls who live in the room are marked next to the door. The residents liked to switch rooms and also frequently attempted to, even though it was forbidden. The girls tried to find arguments to convince the educators of their need to change rooms. Sometimes this worked out, but the staff did not like it when the residents changed their living places. Obviously, the names by the door should also have been changed according to the actual living arrangements, but this did not always happen. Thus, it seemed that the names by the doors were mostly just fiction. As a rule, the edu-

cator on duty informed the night monitor if a resident moved into another bedroom.

The appearance of the bedrooms was plain: old mismatched furniture of beds, nightstands, chairs, wardrobes, tables and mirrors. The rooms also looked very different from each other: some bedrooms were clean and in order while other rooms were dirty and messy. Many girls had houseplants in their rooms which made them look a little bit nicer.

The furniture was old and often broken: the doors of wardrobes did not close, the nightstand drawers did not open and so forth. One educator explained: *"The girls are so reckless. They cannot use things neatly, they break everything that lands in their hands."* (I.17.R.a.) Another educator told me: *"Before, the girls were punished for breaking furniture, but now they do what they please. Our only carpenter isn't able to repair everything."* (I.2.B.c.) Many times when the girls were attending classes, I saw the carpenter come to the dormitory to fix things; furniture broken by the girls as well as other things.

Except for three of the rooms that were obviously redecorated more recently, the wallpapers and the ceilings of the rooms were old and dirty. The ceilings are high as expected in such an old building, and it was impossible for the girls to reach up and keep the walls and the ceilings clean. In some rooms, there was evidence that the ceiling had leaked. The poor condition of the bedrooms was frequently discussed in the educators' meetings, for instance in the following way:

(E=educator; M.= manager — both Estonians)

E.: *Last time, when this Russian family visited a girl and I showed them her bedroom I was ashamed. It is so... (ugly).*

M.: *It is possible to repair some rooms. Of course wallpaper is very expensive, but if the girls behave themselves and the educator wants... It is a solvable problem ..."* (III.4.)

The conversation above demonstrates how the quality of the bedrooms was tied to the girls' behaviour. Another point of significance in this connection is the fact that the organisation of repairing and redecorating the rooms meant extra work for the educators.



What surprised me was that in some rooms the beds were placed next to each other, which the girls explained by being scared of sleeping alone. The staff did not permit this, however.

In some rooms there were the personal belongings of the residents, such as radios, tape recorders, toys and table lamps. In two rooms there were pets (guinea pigs and multi-coloured rats). The most pricey private things (clothes, laundry, jewellery, cosmetics, candy and other sweets from home, etc.) girls kept in a closed room called 'komorka'<sup>7</sup>. The room key was in the possession of the educators, and the girls had to ask them to open it when they wanted something from the room. Despite the security, things disappeared at times even from the 'komorka'. The room was very small in size, and the educators could not possibly know exactly who owned what. Moreover, the room was in a similar disorder as everything else around it. For instance, only two months after I first arrived at the school I learned that our 'komorka' was not only at our own use, but another form held their precious things there as well. Because of stealing, the girls constantly had problems with the personal things of daily use (caps, small electric water heaters). A special aspect of these problems was that the girls had no money in their hands. If they wanted to buy something, their only option was to ask an educator to do it. It depended on the educator's whim if she agreed to buy what the girl needed or not. This was also used by the staff as an effective method of disciplining the residents, because the girls well knew that an educator who was dissatisfied with the resident's behaviour could reject the girl's appeal.

Of course, not all the wishes of residents were satisfied anyway. Smoking was totally prohibited at the institution, and no educator would have bought cigarettes for the girls. However, the girls traded things to get what they wanted. If some girls got a hold of cigarettes, the others could trade something valuable or otherwise desired from their private things. All kinds of trading, whether it was clothes of other things, was forbidden, the girls found ways to do it and it was virtually impossible to know what belonged to whom.

The institution had a laundry and also provided clothes for the girls if necessary. When a girl left the institution, all clothes had to

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<sup>7</sup> 'Komorka' is a Russian word that means a larder or a pantry.

be returned. Even tights were to be given back. Most girls, however, used their own clothes and did their own laundry.

Both Russian-speaking and Estonian-speaking residents lived on the same floors but in separate bedrooms. Mainly, girls who were in the same form shared the same bedrooms. Every form had two, or more bedrooms depending on the size of the form.

The sanitary facilities were insufficient. The number of the girls who lived on the second floor varied between fifty eight and sixty two during the time of my fieldwork, and there were only five wash basins, two toilets and no shower. Warm water was provided by one hundred-litre water heater. The residents also did their laundry in the same facilities. The only shower was in the in-patients' ward at the clinic. The girls could use an old sauna, but there was no shower either, only wash basins. This was clearly not adequate for the residents to keep their clothes clean, and some residents did not wash themselves at all, and often had problems with head lice. I was shocked because it was the duty of the residents themselves to keep the toilets and the wash rooms clean, but they were not given any detergent for the work and had to use only water. This was particularly surprising to me because the staff members repeatedly emphasised that cleanliness is a very important issue in bringing up girls. However, there were residents, who really cared about their personal hygiene and washed their laundry regularly.

There were also mice and rats in the building. The management admitted that the sanitary facilities were poor, and said they were planning to renovate the toilets and build a shower. As I came to know later, these plans were also realised. However, I could not help noticing that the poor sanitary facilities did not seem to cause much worry neither among the staff, nor the residents. One reason for such an indifferent attitude towards what I considered to be a major problem can perhaps be explained by the fact that many residents came from asocial families with much worse living conditions compared to the inadequate sanitary facilities of the K. School.

During an unofficial discussion about the problem of rodents in the building, one educator told me she prefers to have them alive rather than rotting from the effects of rat poison somewhere under the floor. The other staff members agreed with her.

### 3.1.2.4. The School

On the left flank of the main building there was the school part, where the teaching took place.

In 1970s, the Estonian school system began to use a so-called cabinet system instead of each class having its homeroom. The cabinet system means that every subject has its own classroom, and the pupils move from cabinet to cabinet depending on what is the subject of their class. The K. School also had different cabinets with facilities for the subject in question, and the girls had each class in a different room. The classroom furniture was similar to that of the dormitory — old and tired. On the walls there were slogans and quotations from famous people connected to the subject. Most of the things on the stands on the walls were decorative and seldom changed. There were many nice flowers and potted plants in the classrooms.

In the mornings the residents studied in different classrooms. However, every form had their own supervising teacher, and did their homework in the cabinet of that teacher's subject under the supervision of an educator. My form's own teacher taught physics and mathematics, and so I ended up spending a lot of time in the physics and mathematics classroom supervising the homework of my form students.

The classroom had several lockers with different kinds of teaching and learning aids in them. There was also an old tape recorder and a TV set that were out of order, and some other equipment the function of which I did not know. From time to time, the girls tried to 'repair' the tape recorder: "*These things don't work any more*" — the girls explained to me. The other classrooms were more or less the same. The classrooms of the Estonian teachers tended to be a little less decorated with stands and pictures. One classroom was quite different from the others — it was the drawing class. It was full of paints, sheets of paper and paintbrushes, and pictures the girls had drawn or painted were hung on the walls. There was a nice working atmosphere in this classroom. Drawing was the favourite subject of many girls. The best of the girls' pictures decorated the walls of the school's corridors.



The residents had to clean the classrooms twice a day: first, after the classes ended and then after the girls had finished their homework in the evening. One of the residents was always on duty as the monitor. However, the girls often exchanged their turns. To take someone's turn as the monitor was also a possibility to earn something — and most of the time it was a cigarette.

The description presented above reflects my own sense of the space of the institution in general. Without doubt, my perception of the place and its meaning for me was different in comparison with its meaning for the residents and for the staff members. I was an outsider who had the concrete aim to make as many detailed observations as possible. The K. School was a new environment to me, and as such an extremely interesting place because the study of it was my work, my opportunity for development and growth in my professional career and self-realisation. Coming to that place and being there had a positive meaning for me; particularly in the beginning. Despite the difficulties and fears I had, this place was of extreme interest to me. It presented a challenge to me, and being there was my own choice. As I observed and described the place, I focused my attention on details, which I thought are important in order to understand how the institution functions.

The choice of details for description are perhaps tied to my preliminary expectations and imagination about what kind of a scary place such an institution could be. Firstly, I expected everything to be strictly regulated; after all, the K. School is an institution based on the controlled education and upbringing of adolescent girls. I expected a well regulated space with clear borders and disciplined order. I expected that the space was designed to help in the socialisation of troubled adolescent girls, that is, to teach them norms, rules, and discipline. Instead of that I found a space which in itself was somehow unregulated. It reminded me of the buildings Kafka described: if you open a door you can never be sure that behind that door is the same room which was there yesterday. With a little fictional exaggeration, even the door itself could disappear. The only thing that was stable was the fact that the doors were locked and they were difficult to open even when the key was in your hand. However, this description of the space expresses my attitudes, which also changed during the period of fieldwork. I started to lose my interest in being open to new

details in the space, on the one hand, because of the difficulties in my relationships with the residents; and, on the other hand, because of the difficulties in solving everyday problems. I also lost the openness to perceive new details with the flowing of the time. The place became ordinary, ugly and unpleasant to me, but after a while I got used to it all. I noticed how my attitude towards this place changed during time. What was initially extremely interesting eventually turned to be boring and in the end, even hateful.

### 3.2. The Actors Present the Stage: Metaphors of 'Madhouse' and 'Home'

With regard to the dialogical character of language (see also chapter 6.1.), people use different resources of persuasion such as metaphors, metonyms, synecdoche and irony. Using tropes was long associated primarily with fictional texts, but it is common also in ordinary everyday conversational texts, both written and spoken. (Atkinson 1990, Billig 1991, Burke 1989, Chilton & Schäffner 1997, Gill & Whedbee 1997, Jakobson 1969, Titcher *et al.* 2000, etc.) Burke's definition of metaphor (1989: 247–8) seems to be quite exact:

*"Metaphor is a device for seeing something in terms of something else. It brings out the thisness of that, or the thatness of this. If we employ the word 'character' as a general term for whatever can be thought of as distinct (any thing, pattern, situation, structure, nature, person, object, act, role, process, event, etc.) then we could say that metaphor tells us something about one character as considered from the point of view of another character. And to consider A from the point of view of B is, of course, to use B as a perspective upon A."*

Gill and Whedbee (1997: 173) notes upon the connections of metaphor with human form of understanding and human experience:

*"The fundamental form of human understanding is a metaphoric process; the mind grasps an unfamiliar idea only by comparison to or in terms of something already known. Thus the metaphoric language in a text presents a particular view of reality by structuring the understanding of one idea in terms of something previously understood. In this view of metaphor, it shapes human experience."*

Chilton and Schäffner (1997: 222) point out the role of cultural systems where the metaphor (and other tropes) is used, and the symbolic nature of tropes.

*"Recurrent metaphors are embedded in languages and cultures and depend both on the human conceptual system and on cultural systems. Selection from these systems may be used to structure particular discourses, and to reproduce those systems symbolically."*

The attitudes of the teaching staff and other personnel, as well as the residents, towards the institution were different, and were often expressed through a characterisation of the place (the building, the dormitory, the area around the institution, and the village). Two confronting metaphors, a 'madhouse' and a 'home', were the most obvious expressions of these attitudes.

The two metaphors used by actors in their (re)presentation of the institutional space are connected with each other, and express the symbolic meaning of the phenomenon to the actor. The metaphor of 'home' is secondary to the metaphor of 'madhouse', and it seems to me that it appears primarily as the management's reaction to the other.

The metaphor of 'madhouse' has a wider cultural usage on total institutions and systems. It was used by United States in reference to the Soviet Union (Gill & Whedbee 1997: 173), but also inside the Soviet Union. The meaning of the madhouse metaphor was connected with the threat the Soviet Union posed from the viewpoint of the Western world in the context of the Cold War. The Soviet people used it to express the illogical character of the system. The madhouse metaphor used by the K. School residents and middle-level staff has an analogical meaning. It was a metaphor used only by people who were insiders of the institution (residents and staff). People from outside did not use it. For the people who looked at the school from far away it was an institution 'like a prison', and for those whose activities touched the institution one way or another, it was a 'safe place'.

In fact, in this connection also a third metaphor, 'prison', could be added. However, because the prison metaphor was used primarily from outside the institution rather than inside, I chose not add it to the other two. I certainly was interested in the wider public



opinion about the institution. However, I did not carry out a special study on public opinion, but simply randomly asked some people from outside the institution what they imagined the K. School to be like, and made notes of the words which were frequently used in their responses. I collected these kinds of expressions of attitudes from three categories of people. The first category consisted of people (about twenty in number) who were not connected with youth work at all, and aside from the actual existence of the school have little information about it. The second category consisted of people who were connected with youth work and could send a youngster into one of the reformatory schools, such as teachers, child protection officers, youth police inspectors. They were five altogether. The third category were young people themselves; primarily the residents of the K. School but I also had an opportunity to ask seven boys who attended a Tartu Russian school<sup>8</sup> and who were at risk to become residents because of their behavioural problems, what they thought about the K. School.

The data I collected shows that for the people who are not connected with the educational system or youth work, the reformatory exists mostly as a strict punitive institution. *"It is a youth prison for girls", "It is a school behind bars", "I think, it is a place with very strong regime"*. The most typical answers were like these.

For those people who are responsible for sending young people to the reformatory, its meaning is quite different: they see it first of all as a good option for child protection and underline more the positive influence of control. *"It is not so much a punitive institution as a place where the girls are at all times under control"* (from an interview with a child care inspector, Tartu). *"In our situation at the moment it is the only chance to save those children."* (a youth police officer). Another youth police officer also pointed out the protective function of reformatories. She took a negative example from her work about a young boy who had been killed: *"If we could have sent him to a reformatory in time as I had applied for, he could be alive now."*

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<sup>8</sup> In the end of 1997, I participated in group work sessions together with a psychologist and these seven boys. The boys, 14-16 years of age, had behavioural problems at school, and were at risk of being sent into one of the special educational institutions for boys.

For young people, potential residents, the K. School is a horrible place. *"It might be a terrible place"*. Some of the respondents reacted to the question non-verbally — they shook their heads and moved away from the person who asked the question. In a word, for young people the K. School is an institution like a prison which has a very strong regimen, and the young people who are sent there are 'criminals'.

Many of the residents mentioned how they were threatened by teachers and youth police officers that they would be sent to K. long before it happened. It appears that reformatory schools have an important role as a negative preventative measure: They are places that young people should fear and dread as a prison, and would do anything not to be sent to them.

It also became evident in the residents' narratives that before they were ordered to be sent to the institution, they saw it as a prison-like place of punishment and were extremely afraid of it, but when they had arrived and became familiar with the place, it became a madhouse to them.

The metaphor of the K. School as a prison was mentioned only once by a resident when a girl asked me: *"How come you don't understand that it is a prison with its own rules"* (II.28.T.). The metaphors 'madhouse' and 'madness' I heard several times a day: *"I hate this madhouse!"* (II.25.Z.), *"Why do I have to stay in this madhouse?"* (II.12.O. ), *"For how long can I stay in this madhouse?"* (II.3.A.), *"This is a madhouse, you know"* (II.26.C.), etc.

The two metaphors, 'home' and 'madhouse', created an opposite pair. Thus, the metaphor of 'madhouse' was used by residents and middle level staff members, while the metaphor of 'home' belonged to rhetoric of the managers.

The metaphor of madhouse was expressed in various ways. Most often the institution was just named a madhouse ('hullumaja' in Estonian and 'дурдом' in Russian). This 'madhouseness' was tied to other related notions, which expressed specific behaviour of both the residents and the staff members: *"It drives me mad"* (*"Ajab mind hulluks"*; *"Меня бесит!"*), *"I go mad!"* (*"Ma lähen hulluks!"*) These expressions were full of negative emotions, and were also uttered in a very emotional way — loud and clear.

However, the institution's peculiar madhouse attribute given to it by both the residents and the staff members was also connected with the notion of 'own rules'. However, the rules were quite different in comparison, for instance, to prison rules. The picture of prison rules in above-mentioned extract imagined by the girls is based on brute physical power: if one does not submit to the 'bosses' (within the hierarchy among the residents) she must be punished (beaten up). The logic here is evident. On the contrary, madhouse rules are illogical. They are constantly changing, and people have no way of knowing what the actual rules are, or how they work. Nobody knows the consequences of a given act, and a one-time reaction to a certain act is not repeated but can be totally different the next time. One time an act leads to punishment, another time it may be ignored, or the actor even receives praise for what he/she has done. Unexpected reactions and behaviour are the main characteristics of madhouse rules.

The staff used the notion of 'madhouse' for instance in situations such as: *"Thank God I'm finished for today in this madhouse!"* (*"Jumal tänatud, lõppetasin selles hullumajas tänaseks!"*) *"Now I go home from this madhouse"* (*"Lähen koju sellest hullumajast."*); *"What happens here? It's a madhouse!"* — *when many girls yell together* (*"Mis siin toimub? Täitsa hullumaja!"*), *"Are you crazy?"* (*"Вы что, с ума все походили?"*).

I myself used the metaphor of madness as an expression of surprise, and as I was constantly surprised at the institution, I also used the expression daily: *"One can go mad here"* (*"С ума сойму!"*, *"Hulluks võib minna"*).

The metaphor of "madhouse" was used in the following meanings:

- strange, unusual norms *"Here everything is abnormal"* (*"Kõik on siin ebanormaalne"*);
- unusual behaviour *"She behaves as if she was mad"* (*"Ta käitub nagu hull"*), (*"Ты что, с ума сошла?"*, *"Сдурела?"*);
- feeling of inadequacy *"I feel I'll go mad here"* (*"Я чувствую, что сойду с ума здесь"*);
- surprise *"Are you crazy?"*, *"It is possible to go mad"* (*"С ума сошла?"* *"Крыша едет!"*);
- stupidity *"I am foolish"* (*"Ma olen loll"*);



- mental illness, psychological disorder, insanity (*"We had never had so many disturbed girls"*).

A madhouse is a place full of mad people who behave abnormally. This can be expressed not only through words, but through actions as well:

- anger, aggressive, uncontrolled behaviour, expressed by a loud cry or attacks on other girls without any reason;
- loud crying and laughter without reason;
- beating walls, tables and so on with hands and feet;
- convulsions;
- defecating in the isolation room's floor;
- cutting skin on hands and feet (*"I'll calm down when I see my blood"*).

Thus, madhouse is a strange, unknown world, which is simultaneously dangerous and boring. People in a madhouse do not know what may happen, but they know that everything that will happen is going to be unpleasant. People do not understand this strange world, it is totally different from home, where everything is familiar, safe and peaceful.

As I have already mentioned, the metaphor 'madhouse' ('madness') is widely used in ordinary language as well. In regard to the K. School, it is interesting that the staff in general used the term in such a transferred, 'metaphorical' meaning, while the residents used it also in direct meaning.

When the girls spoke about their illnesses, they did not use the word as a metaphor: *"You know I am this like. (Points at her head with her index finger.) The doctor said to me that if I kill somebody I won't be punished!"* (II.1.K.a.); *"I am sick, I've been in a mental hospital several times"* (II.3.D.b.).

An especially interesting utterance is the following. During an evening conversation when the residents spoke about things that happened during the day, one girl told me: *"I visited a psychiatric doctor today and he said to me that I will be sent to the hospital in May. Oh, I will get rest from this madhouse!"* (II.15.B.d.). The girl expressed a very interesting relationship between a 'madhouse' as a

psychiatric hospital, and a 'madhouse' (дурдом) as a synonym for the K. School. One is 'madhouse' because there are sick people in there; the other because a person becomes sick there. The reason for becoming sick is tied to the abnormal conditions in the institute. Of course, the conditions are seen as 'abnormal' from the perspective of the residents. What happens and how it takes place in the K. School is strange, incomprehensible or difficult to understand, illogical and non-acceptable for the residents.

The residents' behaviour changed during their time stay at the institution. I had the opportunity to be present when a few new girls first entered the school, and observe them during a period of four months. M.'s story is a good example of this kind of behavioural change. M. was a new girl at the school; she arrived the day before I arrived. After two weeks, we noticed that something was happening to her. She cried a lot and wanted to go home. She told us that she would never get used to the life in the institution. "*The girls are like they were abnormal- wild: they cry out loud, convulse...*" (II.9.I.b.). She was a very quiet girl in the beginning, but as the time passed she became nervous. She ate a lot and always carried many pieces of bread in her hand and pockets and gnawed at them continuously. She often laughed out loud. She became more indifferent towards the staff and was increasingly difficult to make contact with, and started behaving in a very demanding way towards her parents.

When I was reading the personal dossiers of the residents, I had the chance to follow also the development of other residents whose behaviour became increasingly problematic with time. Gradually, growing violence toward other residents was mentioned particularly often. It was evident that the length of time a girl spent inside the institution was in direct correlation to her worsening behaviour.

The metaphorical use of 'mad/-house/-ness' by the residents was connected with expressing something strange, violent, unexpected, boring, incorrect, abnormal, and false. As an opposite to this place, the residents used notion of 'home'. Home was something not connected with the institution. The girls never used the word 'home' when they referred to the school. For instance, they never said "Let's go home" after a walk, but something on the lines of "*Let's go to the house/floor!*" ("*Lähme majja, lähme korrusele*"). The middle-level staff used the same words when they talked to the girls, and

avoided using the word 'home': "*Go to your bedroom*", "*Go to your place*", "*Go to the floor*" ("*Mine oma tuppa*", "*Mine oma kohale*", "*Minge korrusele*").

At the same time, the term 'home' was a widely used metaphor by the managers. It was an expression of their wish to develop the institution in the future to become a place that could substitute for the homes of the girls who were removed from them. It was to be the 'real' home for the girls who were neglected in their original homes, it should replace their homes, and provide protection, safety, warmth and care. However, the managers also avoided the word 'home' when they spoke with residents, but only used it when they were talking with each other. They knew that it is risky to call this 'madhouse' where the residents were confined as 'home'.

For the managers, the creation of 'home' started with the renovation of building. One of the managers told me that she is dreaming about a beautiful building where the girls will be educated. However, this metaphor is also connected to other related metaphors which referred to treating the girls and caring for them as mothers do. (In more detail, see chapter 6.3.3.)

When the middle-level staff members visited an equivalent institution in Finland, they also began to speak a lot about changing the school building into a 'home'. This mainly meant re-painting the walls. There was one thing with regard to the renovation and re-painting surprised me a lot. The work was not started in the actual living space of the residents, but in rooms which were little used by the girls themselves. For instance, there were nice rooms meant for the use of a rehabilitation group for girls who would be leaving the school<sup>9</sup>. These rooms were redecorated long before the end of the school year. At the same time, many residents had to live in rooms which were in very bad condition.

Nevertheless, not every of resident disliked the life at the institution. On the contrary, there were girls who were used to the regime

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<sup>9</sup> The management had outlined a programme for those residents who had no place to go after they left the K. School. This was the first time the institution provided a meeting place and other forms of support to the girls. The programme was implemented only after I had left the institution, and therefore I have not included it in my research.



and the life style, and had good relationships with the staff and other residents. However, even these girls used the metaphor of 'madhouse' in reference to the school, and avoided using the word 'home' about it. There were girls who in fact had no home at all, but even they dreamed about the homes of their relatives where everything would be much better. Only another institution, a children's home, was not a rival to the K. School. Those girls who came from a children's home never regarded the place as a 'home' and had no daydreams about it. However, there was not one resident who would not dream about one place or another, however inaccessible and far away, as a real home. There was a girl in my group, for instance, whose mother was in prison, father lived in another country and she had stayed in a children's home before coming to K. She had no relatives except for one distant aunt, whom she had visited only a few times during her entire life. Now she called her aunt often, and spoke to me about her dream to go and live with her.

The metaphor of 'home' meant for the girls a place other than the institution. The 'home' was often idealised, and tied to people close to the girls. If there were no parents, then the 'home' would be that of relatives or very close friends. The notion of 'home', as the residents used it in their speech, was connected with freedom and an interesting, familiar and safe life. Naturally, the girls idealised their real homes, and knew that, too. It was difficult for me to get them to talk about their homes. To the question 'What is your home like?' they answered: 'Normal'. However, what meanings were attached to this 'normal' was hard to understand. If I asked the girls what 'normal' meant, the answer I would get every single time was 'as other people live'.

## 4. THE RECONSTRUCTION OF ACTORS

“... our identity and ourselves as persons come to be produced by socially and culturally available discourses. ... Discourses, provide us with conceptual repertoires, with which we can represent ourselves and others. (Burr 1997: 140–41)

In this chapter, I attempt to represent the participants of the institutional activities in the K. School. The main actors are the residents and the staff. Because this research focuses on the role of interactions in the process of managing troubled young people, the following description is construed through self-presentation and presentation of the ‘other side’ of the interactive partners. In the process of interaction, people interpret not only the events and phenomena around them, but also their own personal selves. Other people’s interpretations of oneself plays a specific role in this construction of discourse about oneself. During the socialisation process (learning to speak) a child simultaneously learns techniques of interacting, that is, shares the defining and interpreting processes, and participates in the construction of his/herself together with other people around him/her. Socialisation as the internalisation of rules and norms continues through the adoption of ready meanings and ready interpretations (interpretative repertoires, see Burr 1997: 116–118). Self-identity is a result of socialisation as a collective process that is based on the opinions other people — socialisation agents — who transmit information /reflection to the subject of socialisation about him/her.

*“What is the self that the child recognises? It tends to appear as a third person. He takes that form of the self which appears in the speech of other. He is good or bad. That becomes the model for the child in building up his own self.” (Mead 1982: 54) “The posses-*

*sive as well as the personal pronouns belong to the 'me'; the self is secondary. Others come into existence first of all, and later one becomes aware of one's self.*" (Mead 1982: 56)

Every person has not only one but many reflective interpretations about her/himself, and based on personal experiences, sympathy, and so on, makes choices which result in the creation of the 'significant other'. The process of presenting oneself involves such factors as the imagined expectations of the audience and the wish to reflect those expectations, which both depend on the importance of the audience to one; one's own image about the role in which one presents him/herself; the current situation; and the Meadian 'significant other'. On the one hand, this is a voluntary process: one largely decides what parts and aspects of him/herself he/she chooses to show or tell to the others. In short, the child — or any person — is a product of a collective constructing process, in which he/she is one of the participants.

Taking into account the process described above, I present the data as I received and familiarised myself with it. I attempt to let the actors themselves speak both about themselves and each other. I hope to give the reader the opportunity to learn what the actors consider important to tell about themselves and their interactive partners. However, one should remember that in this work, I am the one to whom the actors told their stories. Thus, in addition to the actors' interactive processes, attitudes and other demonstrations, also the relationship between a researcher and the researched is significant here. However, I had, so to speak, a three-sided role in the K. School. For the residents I was an ordinary educator, whereas for the staff members I was both a fellow educator and a researcher, and for the management I was first and foremost a researcher.

At the same time that I acted in the role of a researcher, I was also an active participant in the interactions. I recognise my own active role in following presentation of the scene, actors, and activity at the institution. To the reader I provide the possibility to become familiar with the institution at first through my own eyes and ears.

I have chosen extracts from both the actors' interviews and free conversations when they speak about themselves, each other or the institutional activity, and proceed from these descriptions and pres-



entations which I have found to be either the most typical or, in contrast, the most unique and unexpected.

I seek answers to the question of why people made the choice to give out the particular kind of information they did about themselves, others and their activities.

In addition to the self-presentations, I include information about the actors that I acquired from public sources, such as official documents about the institution and descriptions of institutions for troubled young people published by the Ministry of Education. I treat this information as independent data.

#### 4.1. The Residents

The official definition of K. School residents is: the residents are teenager girls under seventeen years of age *"who have broken the law or have systematically avoided school, loitered, ignored moral norms, and require strict education"* (Rajangu & Meriste 1997: 32). In the new mandate of the institution, which came into force 25 February 1999, the K. Special Needs School is defined as a *"school that offers primary education, and where such pupils (female) who need special guidance in education to complete their compulsory education are sent either by a recommendation of the youth commissions with a verification by a court, or on the basis of a court decision."* In an Internet web-side the school defines their residents as girls (tütarlapsed), who bear a grudge against the law. (<http://www.luunja.ee/~kaagvere/>, 17.03.01, 754 b) In recent years, the definition of the residents of the K. Special Needs School has become increasingly homogenous, but the educational role of the institution has remained the same. It is tied to current developments in the residential management of troubled young people in Estonia along with the Juvenile Sanctions Act that came into force in 1998, one year after the my fieldwork in the K. School for this study (this was discussed in chapter 2.4.1.3.).

The number of residents changed over the time of the field study. On 1 February 1997 the number of residents was 86, and by the end of May 1997 — 90. The number of the residents fluctuated in the following way:

- 2 residents who had escaped and been missing for a long time were caught and taken back to the institution
- 6 new residents were sent to the institution.
- 2 residents escaped in April and didn't come back during the period of my fieldwork
- 2 residents were discharged from the school just before the end of the session (1997.05.14.) (The details about this event will be described in chapter 5.5.)

One resident had the privilege to leave and return to the school as she pleased, and I even am not sure if she was included in the list of pupils. Another girl, a daughter of a member of the staff, attended the school at the time. However, she did not stay at the dormitory but lived at home with her mother. All and all, it is difficult to tell the exact number of the residents at any given time because the number changed back and forth very quickly.

The youngest of the girls was ten years old. The average age of the residents was 14 years. One-third of the residents were Russian-speaking and studied in Russian language at the K. School, and formed their own community.

#### 4.1.1. Naming

In the official Estonian legislation, children (persons under 18 of age) who have special educational needs due to different kinds of learning difficulties (mental, physical or behavioural) are named 'deviant' ('hälvik'), and the special needs schools for them are named as 'special needs schools for deviants' ('hälvikute erikoolid') (Estonian Law on Primary and Secondary Education paragraph 4(1),(2),(4); paragraph 16(2); paragraph 21(2),(3),(4) (RT I 1993). The Juvenile Sanctions Act does not use the same term. The subjects of law are defined as minors (juveniles) aged from seven to eighteen years who have violated either the criminal or administrative law, compulsory education as it is prescribed in the Law on education, or use alcohol, drugs or psychotropic substances (RKs RT I 1998).

The term 'deviants', or 'delinquents', is also used in the professional Estonian literature (Aunapuu 1989, 1992; Peretsell 1997; Strömpl 1996, etc.) A new term, 'children with problem behaviour'

('probleemkäitumisega laps') or 'problem child' ('probleemne laps') (Kraav & Kõiv 1997; Kõrgesaar 1999; Kõiv 2000; Laane & Laane 1999; Laane 2000; Leino 1996, Strömpl 1998, 1999, etc.)<sup>10</sup> appeared in the end of the 1990s. Juridical literature uses juridical terminology such as 'criminal offenders' and 'juvenile offenders' (Ginter *et al.* 2000, Kaugia 2000, Raska 1980, Saar 1988, etc.)

In the K. School, nobody called the girls 'deviants' ('hälvik') or 'delinquents' ('seaduserikkuja'), even though the identification of the institution as a 'special needs school for deviants' ('hälvikute erikool') is evident.

The residents call themselves 'girls' ('tüdrukud') in Estonian which is a neutral name for female young people. In Russian there are some differences in names. The Russian residents call each other and themselves 'девки' — a low-style word which can either be used to indicate that a young woman has reached sexual maturity but is not married, as in old maid ('в девках засиделась'); to refer to a parlour-maid in an old-fashioned, low-style way; or even to a (non-professional) prostitute ('Всю ночь провел у девок'). (Ozhegov 1983: 139).

When the Estonian staff spoke about the residents, they primarily used the term 'child', 'children' (laps) and also 'girls' (tüdrukud), or, more rarely, the word 'plika'. The Estonian-English Dictionary gives the next English equivalents to 'plika': "teenage girl (*Am.sl.*) teenybopper, flapper, (*sl.*), (*Am.fam.*) bobbysoxer, hussy, huzzy..." (Saagpakk 1992: 639).

The Russian staff almost never used the Russian word 'ребенок' or 'дети' (child, children) in the conversations among themselves about the residents, but usually the neutral and polite word 'девочки' which means 'female child' or the word used also by the resident: 'девки'. In interactions with the residents the Russian staff also used the 'девченки' (girls), but almost never the word 'девушка' which means 'young unmarried woman', 'young lady'. Referring to

<sup>10</sup> The using of such stigmatising terms was common also in case of disabled people. For example, the Estonian Statistical Yearbook used term 'handicap' until 1998 and since 1999 started to use term 'people with special needs'. However, it is not exactly clear whether this category also includes children with special needs due to behavioural problems.



and speaking with an individual resident, the staff used her last name. This is a prevailing practice in Russian schools. Despite the fact that the Russian staff did not use the word 'child', the attitudes of both the Estonian and Russian staff members were the same: they perceived the residents as persons who were not able to take responsibility for their actions, as well as were in need of care, control and protection; in a word, dependent.

#### 4.1.2. Becoming a Resident: the Procedure of Sending a Minor to the Institution

All of the residents were sent to the institution by a special commission appointed by the Ministry of Education. The procedure of sending a juvenile to a special needs school was prepared by the local child protection worker together with the child's school and the youth police. In administrative terms, the procedure was considered to be a change of school, and therefore parental consent was required. The commission deliberated on the case of the girl in question on the basis of documents such as the written parental statements, reports from school written by the girl's form teacher, the last school report, and a personality description given by the child protection worker and/or a youth police officer. All of these documents together with the decision of the commission are filed at the institution. When I read these documents the style of the parental statements caught my attention. They were quite similar to one another. A typical text was written on the lines: *"Please help me, I cannot cope with the upbringing of my daughter any longer. She does not obey me, she runs away from home, she disappears for long periods, she wanders around, she does not attend school. She has bad friends, and indulges in alcohol."* Sometimes a phrase such as *"She stole money from home"* was added.

After the new law was passed in 1998, sending a child to a special needs school can only be done by court order (see chapter 2.4.1.3.). Such a severe sanction can be used, for instance, in a case where a youngster has committed some serious offence against the law. More minor behavioural problems, such as school truancy alone, is no longer a sufficient reason to send a child to a special

needs school. This also signifies that the special needs schools are becoming more of correctional institutions. Now, a large part of the residents of the K. School can be young female criminal offenders, whereas before 1998 it was primarily young people with different troubles and even problems that were the result of the life circumstances rather than directly caused by the children themselves who were sent to the school. For example, conflicts with parents could result in the parents applying for permission to send their child to a special needs school. In the new situation, where a criminal offence is the primary reason for sending a youngster to a special needs school, there is an expected tendency that the resident body will become more homogeneous, and consequently their management can be planned according to this homogeneity. During my fieldwork, and years before, the residents were a heterogeneous group, starting from neglected children at risk and ending up with very difficult criminal offenders (see Strömpl 1996).

#### **4.1.3. The Residents Present Themselves**

The following data was produced during my conversations with the residents. In the evenings when I was on duty in the dormitory (or 'on the floor' as it was called in the vocabulary of the inside staff) the residents liked to talk with me. I was not an exception among the educators: most of the girls were looking for opportunities to have a conversation with staff members. The most preferred topic of conversations with staff members were one or another of the current problems of the residents, relations with other residents, or worries about their home and family. Otherwise, the girls were agreeable to talk about whatever topics concerning their own life. During these evening conversations the girls talked about their life before the K. School, about their families and home, and told stories about their journey to the institution. I usually had one-to-one conversations with the girls when there was a sufficient amount of educators on duty, and the others gave me the possibility to have individual conversations, which usually took place in the little educators room on the second floor or somewhere in the corridor or in the residents' bedroom, during walks and other such private situations.

The initiative for such conversations came from the residents. I was actually surprised how much these teenager girls wanted to communicate with adult people, especially when the communication was free from condemnation and the adult did not use the opportunity to preach. During these conversations, I proposed that the girls tell me what they themselves choose to tell, rather than answer my questions. In my field notes there are 37 registered stories, which are all different from each other: they vary from brief pieces of information to deep and detailed autobiographical stories. These conversations lasted from a short 10–15 minutes to over an hour. With some residents I talked several times about the same topic. Naturally, I had the chance to learn about the lives of the girls in my own group in more detail, but also residents from other groups often sought me out for conversations, particularly Estonian girls. I was surprised when the university student of special pedagogy — that I mentioned in another connection — who was at the institution at the same time as I, told me in her interview that it was the Russian girls who most frequently sought her company for conversation, and that in her opinion Russian girls were more open to communication than Estonian girls. (The student herself is Estonian.) I had an opposite experience: many Estonian girls came to me, who to them was officially a Russian educator, 'for a talk in private'. One explanation for this may be that both I and the student were outsiders (new workers), and even more so to the residents from other parts of the school than were we primarily worked; I for the Estonian girls and the student for Russian girls. This situation guaranteed that there was a good chance for the conversations to be more informal, 'off duty', and free, without the risk of using the information the girls revealed about themselves to others, or even against the girl herself. At the same time, this distance provided the opportunity to mix a little fantasy into the story. This happened a few times, but the fantasy parts were so obvious that it was not difficult to recognise them. Some residents, for instance, described actions where they behaved in a very bold and heroic way, or described their family members as eminent people. The exaggerations with which the residents embellished their lives stories is an important part of the data in studying their personality. I did not deal directly with this topic, which should be the task of a school psychologist. When I suspected



that that a story I had heard was somewhat embellished, I later sought additional information by either reading the personal case of the girl in question or asking other staff members who knew the personal histories of the residents better.

However, in general the girls embellished their stories surprisingly little and the exaggerations touched not so much the facts, but the details of the stories or interpretations. On the contrary, they told stories about their lives before the special needs school with ordinary simplicity. As a rule these were terrible stories about their family background, about heavy drinking, conflicts, fighting, killing and suicide. Many residents were orphans whose mothers had been murdered, committed suicide or died from drinking. One fragile and tender young girl with big brown eyes introduced her family: her mother choked to death on her own vomit, her father was in prison convicted of murder, she and her younger sister lived with her grandmother, but the grandmother was sick and the girl spent most of her time in the cellar with her friends. Once the grandmother sent her younger sister to call her home, but when this little 11-year-old girl came to the cellar the older sister was not there and her friends raped her. The girl told about this event using the word 'my friends'. It seemed to me that this event was nothing extraordinary in their company:

*"My other friend raped his own six-year-old sister. He was 13 then and he didn't know that it is prohibited. But now he cares very much about his sister, buys her everything: clothes and sweets."*  
(II.28.K.)

It is important to underline the notion of 'knowing nothing' about the norms according to which the children are assessed. Many girls spoke about that that they only learned that certain things were prohibited when they came to the K. School. Unfortunately, they receive such information together with strong negative assessments given by the adults, who inform them that everyone should be aware of what exactly the norms are, whereas not knowing 'elementary moral norms' is an anomaly.

Fear for the mother's life was often presented in the narratives of the residents, as well as stories about the death of the mother. The girls often had a perfectly reasonable basis for this.

In one example from the field notes registered as a conversation, a resident tells the story of her mother's suicide:

(R. = a resident; I. = the interviewer)

"R.: She (mother) was also baptised, but she made a big sin. (She wanted to be the godmother of aunt T's daughter and that's why she got baptised.) And then, last summer she laid her hands on herself (committed suicide). My sister just wrote that they went to the cemetery and lit a candle from me also. I told her to tell my greetings to mother (cries).

I.: It was difficult time for you...

R.: Yes. I took her down from the loop a few times. She shut herself in the bathroom, like this... 'What are you doing there?' 'Nothing, — she told. — I'm washing' 'Ahha' — I thought, I understand. I opened the door with a pin. She pretended that she was going to wash, but 'why do you need this rope for washing?' And she, drunk like this, you know how it is happens? It was uncle V. who made her that drunk. ... Twice when I found her she was already unconscious ...

I.: So you didn't live with your own father?

R.: I haven't seen my own father since I was two. ... He came to the funeral...

I.: And the children's home? How did you end up in the children's home?

R.: After mother's death we were staying at grandma's. They said they'd let us stay there until the 20<sup>th</sup> of August. But they came on 19. We ran away, but they found us. Also later, I ran away from the children's home, or returned late at night. I got back something like three o'clock in the morning... Sometimes I was also drunk. And there was this educator, u-u-u a witch she was, she hated me, she made me write explanatory notes. Soon I had too many explanatory notes, and they sent me to K.' ..." (II.1.N.)

Another resident described her mother's death in the following way:

II. (L = a resident; I. = the interviewer)

"L.: Could you take a letter to my grandmother, she lives near your place.

I.: I don't know if it is allowed? ...

- L.: Yes, V.V. always takes my letters when she's going to the town. You can read it...
- I.: OK, just get it ready.
- L.: I wrote it already, it's true I have failed some times. My nerves are not so good.
- I.: Tell me about yourself. Have you been here for long?
- L.: I've been here for six months, from September... I didn't go to school. ... My father strangled my mother four years ago. He is a drunkard, I hate him. First they concealed from me that it was father who killed her. They tried to make me believe that my mother killed herself, but I know it isn't the truth. ... I wanted to kill him many times. I tried to poison him with gas, put poison into his vodka: 'Take, daddy! Drink!' But the last moment — no, I couldn't do it.
- I.: You were right not to do it. I can understand that you wanted to pay him back for your mother, but if you kill somebody it is the same sin. It couldn't help your pain.
- L.: Yes I understood that. And he is punished by God — a cripple. He has nothing: no flat, nothing — homeless! As long as I was in the town I gave him some food, but now...
- I.: Where did you live after your mother's death?
- L.: I lived with my grandma.
- I.: How was it there?
- L.: It was fine. Only my uncle ... he beat grandma up. ... He demanded money from her. I had to protect grandma. ..."  
(II.4.L.a.)

When the girls explained the reasons for being sent to the K. School, they often mentioned not attending school and running away from home. With regard to problems in school, I expected to hear about conflicts with school teachers and accusations of unfairness. However, as a rule the girls did not blame the school. They admitted that they did not go to school because of different reasons: "I understood that I had to go to school, but it was so boring there... I just didn't want to go there. Every day I told to myself 'tomorrow'." (II.9.I.a.)

Even when a girl told about being scared in front of a teacher, she saw that the teacher had the right to punish her: "First I was late to the classes. We lived far from the school. Then I became scared to go



*there at all, because I was afraid that the teacher would scold me for being late. So I stopped going altogether.*" (II.15.B.c.)

Other Estonian studies give similar accounts about problems with attending school (see for instance, Heinla 2001: 98–9, Kadajane 2001: 58–65, Laane 2000: 54–6, etc.).

A girl, whose parents visited her many times at the institution and cared about her a lot, told about her escape from home as if it were an occasional accident: she drove with her friends to a cottage outside the city, and when she wanted to return, they realised that the car had run out of gas and she had no money to take a bus. Hence, there was no way to get back home that same night, and after that she was too scared to go home at all. She had been staying with her friends for one and a half months when the police found her and took her back home. She didn't go to school for about a year. When asked how it was possible without her parents finding out, she explained that every morning she left home, but instead of school went to her friends. To her parents, she showed a fake timetable, and to school she took a counterfeit letter from her parents in which 'the parents' gave notice that the whole family was travelling to Russia for a long period of time. Records in her personal dossier also showed that she stole money from home and participated in group thefts. After she was returned home by the police, she refused to stay and moved in with her boyfriend (she was 14 at the time). Her boyfriend lived with his mother, and when I asked what the mother had to say about her moving in, she answered that she had explained not being able to go back home because she was at odds with her own mother. Such stories and explanations were quite typical of residents who came from so-called 'normal' families; families with no visible problems such as criminal background, alcohol and/or drug addiction or extreme poverty.

Another girl spoke openly about how she entered in a company of drug addicts, stopped going to school, and how she finally understood that she could not give up the lifestyle on her own. She herself asked to be sent to the special needs school. There were three other residents who came to the K. School voluntarily, but this was not common.

Some of residents gave themselves very critical characterisations. A. was one of the more difficult residents at the school. She terror-

ised other residents, didn't carry out her duties, did not submit to the school regimen at all, and harmed herself for the slightest reason. Once I arranged to have a conversation with her about her life story.

*(A. = a resident; I. = interviewer)*

I.: *Would you like to talk to me?*

A.: *(nods her head yes)*

I.: *How long have you been here?*

A.: *(she speaks sometimes clearly, sometimes very quietly and incoherently; she is sprawled on the chair with her face turned to the wall): I don't remember.*

I.: *Where are you from?*

A.: *From N (a little village), d'you know it?*

I.: *Yes, I was there once. There is a big institution for elderly people there.*

A.: *And a children's home. ... I did a lot of bad things to those old people.*

I.: *Are you from that children's home?*

A.: *No, I lived together with my mother and stepfather. I have an older brother, he's studying programming (computer) in Tallinn, my older sister also has higher education. My mom is a store manager, the stepfather – a manager of a firm. My own father killed himself when I was six years old. I found him.*

I.: *Oh, that must been a very difficult time for you... And the troubles started soon after?*

A.: *No, I was eleven when I started roaming around and drinking. All the bad people found me. My friends were the worst people around.*

I.: *Do you want to be very negative?*

A.: *Yes I like to be very bad, make trouble.*

I.: *What does it give to you?*

A.: *I don't know, I can't think of anything whatsoever.*

I.: *You told you used to drink ...*

A.: *Yes, I drank a lot.*

I.: *What is it that you want to escape all the time?*

A.: *?*

I.: *If somebody looks for 'kaif', it means that he/she feels the need to escape. Do you know what it is you need?*

A.: *I need my own father.*

- I.: *Do you think he had another possibility to solve his problem?*  
 A.: *I don't know. I don't know anything about him. I just remember he was protecting somebody, and finally he got into a fight — his face was all bloody...*  
 I.: *He was a good man.*  
 A.: *Yes, he was.*  
 I.: *What about your mother?*  
 A.: *Mother just can't deal with me. I stole money from her shop.*  
 I.: *You are angry with the whole world...*  
 A.: *Only with O. I'm not really angry. I can't fight her.*  
 I.: *She is special.*  
 A.: *Yes, she is my best friend." (II.3.A.a.)*

In this presentation the girl describes herself as a troublemaker with whom nobody can cope, and who does not actually know why she is like that. Her family includes good people with high social status; she is proud of them, but she does not belong to the world of her family. She belongs to the world of 'bad' people who, like she herself, want to be destructive and behave badly. In her narrative, however, her personality is described in the passive: '*All bad people found me*'. To the question why it this happened, she has no answer. She explains the reasons for such behaviour with psychiatric problems and the inability to think.

What is the reason for such a self-presentation? It seems to me that she knew very well what a 'the delinquent girl' is supposed to be like and presented herself expressly as such.

Hence, where some residents were shocked because of simply not knowing what is expected of a girl their age, others knew very well what is needed to make a 'diagnosis' of 'delinquency'. A. lists the classic characteristics of delinquency:

- father suicide and young childhood trauma;
- lack of father and stepfather who is distant, as existing at all;
- mother who can not cope with the daughter's problems;
- bad friends;
- using alcohol and other substances;
- mental problems;
- inability to think, low intellectual capacity;
- lesbian tendencies, etc.



This list could be continued further, but it is already long enough to show how 'professionally' composed it is. Could we speak here about a classic example of secondary deviation, namely, deviant identity?

However, this is only one possible explanation. Perhaps A. wanted to test me and expected help from me in her self-diagnosis. Maybe she tried to understand herself and find an explanation for her behaviour and problems. She even gave me tools to find reasons to her problems by, for instance, mentioning twice the story of her father's suicide. Residents at the K. School were well informed about the impact of childhood traumas on personal development.

I had the opportunity to observe this particular resident for a long time and in various situations. She was quite open and willing to communicate, and we spoke with each other several times. Towards her schoolmates she was aggressive and constantly got into trouble with the other residents, but this seemed to be more like a game. The other girls were not scared of her and easily forgave her aggressive behaviour. The general attitude towards her was rather compassionate. She often showed her solidarity to girls who were punished. She expressed her protest by cutting her own skin. At the same time, she was happy and willing to communicate with staff members, and the staff in general loved her and tried to give her as much support as possible, explaining her problems with psychiatric reasons.

To conclude the residents' self-presentation, it should be pointed out that the most typical information the residents gave about themselves was their family background. In general, the presented families can be divided into so-called normal and troublesome ones. If a resident wanted to emphasise that she comes from a 'normal' family, she pointed out her parents' social status. This was expressed as having good jobs, meaning sufficient income and higher education — prestige.

The education level of the parents was an especially important indicator of social success and the 'normality' of a resident in the K. Special Needs School in its capacity as an educational institution.

In terms of Estonian history, the important role of education can be explained on the one hand though the Lutheran religion, which made education compulsory; and on the other hand, by the fact that

since there never was an Estonian nobility to form a social class with a high social status by birth, the only way to achieve such status was through education. In the Soviet Union, the role of education was also highly valued, which was expressed, for instance, in obligatory secondary education. Matza (1989) speaks about the role of education in the competition between the two superpowers. The significance of education in aspiring for personal success was thus preserved in Estonia also in the Soviet context.

After the restoration of independence, the notion of the importance of education in order to manage better in society continued to exist. Many people experienced that even a high university education was no guarantee for a good job, but this did not make them value education any less. This is reflected in the residents' self-presentations through their families.

The other attribute of 'normal' family is the absence of substance abuse: "*My parents don't drink or smoke...*" — is a typical characterisation of normal parents.

In the descriptions of the girls, the parents in a troubled family are poorly educated, are unemployed or have low-paid jobs, and have problems with drinking, smoking and tendency towards criminal behaviour. Family problems and worry about family members were a common reason for the girls to initiate conversation about their family members, and particularly so when they were concerned about their mothers. It is my belief that by speaking about the difficulties of family life the residents tried to find explanations for their own problems and trouble-making behaviour.

The fact that most of the professionals working among children often ask details about a child's home circumstances when he/she is in trouble may account for another reason why the girls spoke so frequently about their family background. The residents' emphasis on the role of their family life in their situation can perhaps, at least to some extent, be assigned to professionals, such as child care workers and teachers.

The general approach in traditional childhood studies, which has been adopted also in Estonia, focuses on the family environment as the most important thing in everything aspect of a child's life. Not one study has left the family and home circumstances of troublesome children without any attention. (Farrington 1999, Heinla

2001, Kutsar 2000, Qvortrup 1991, Tiit 2000, Toomberg 1995, etc.)

One more reason for the residents to speak so willingly about their family is their homesickness. When an adolescent is placed in a closed institution and often violently separated from his/her family, the importance of the family grows.

In the narratives of the residents whose families had no particular problems (when a girl conceived of her family as a 'normal' one), the girls themselves appear as the troublemakers which, for one or another reason, is directly linked to their personalities. I found that when the girls emphasised the 'normality' of their family where everyone has a successful status in society (parents and siblings with higher education, 'normal' behaviour, etc.) they expected me to be explain why they were the different ones. By giving their own interpretations about the reasons for their 'deviation' they tried to test some concepts through me. In this case, the most typical was the explanation of problems due to mental health problems: 'I am mad', 'I am stupid', and so on, or because of an inborn negative personal quality. This also becomes apparent in other Estonian studies of troubled young people in which the residents of a reformatory institution are compared with so-called normal children (see Kraav 2001: 101–126, Koppel 2001: 97–109, Kõiv 2001: 129–132, Rääsk 2001: 110–118, Vigel 1996: 96–99, etc.).

When the residents assessed their families and lives, the impact of the professionals, mainly the staff of the K. School, was clearly apparent. The longer a girl had stayed at the institution, the more she used 'correct' terms of evaluating her family life, whereas upon arrival the most used attribute given for the family was simply 'normal'. I found that girls who had recently arrived to the school spoke most honestly about their lives and families. They spoke openly and in simple terms about events which later, when the girls faced the societal assessment of their situation through the staff, began to seem lopsided also to them. Evidently a child who has no knowledge about the general rules and values of the society accepts her/his family life style as the only 'normal' kind. The encounter with the general rules and values of wider society produce in this case not only the process of resocialisation, but also deepens the conflict between the child and the society.



The most important information about the relationships inside the family appear to be the lack of them: parents do not speak with their children or share their lives. Children often seem to be only dependants that the parents are forced to take care of, namely to try to meet their material needs (food, clothes, accommodation). Only a few individual girls told me about collective activities with their families. One girl cherished making pancakes together with her mother as the fondest memory of the relationship with her. The children of parents with a substance abuse problem in fact had more opportunities to relate with them, but in the wrong way round: the roles of child and parent shifted and the children were the caregivers for the parents.

The residents often mentioned school truancy as one of the reasons for being sent to the K. School. School problems in general largely referred to skipping school or not attending at all. The girls' explanations about why this happened varied from one to the next, but the most typical answer was that there were other places much more pleasant and interesting. Most of girls felt they could not cope at school: they had difficulties in acquiring academic knowledge, saw themselves as different from other children and were bored. School was a strange world where they felt alienated and lonely, receiving no support from anybody and generally feeling that nobody really cared one way or another<sup>11</sup>.

One issue is missing from the presentations of almost all residents — their relationship with the K. School. In general they identified themselves as K. School residents, but the institution's potential capacity as an opportunity to solve their school problems and learning difficulties seemed curiously distant. Some resident spoke about the importance of receiving education, but this sounded more like repeating other people's words. It appeared that education for them was something very far away from the present, and in their minds not necessarily of concern in their future. They used expres-

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<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, the descriptions of the process of exclusion from school in Kadajne 2001. Kruus (1998) writes in her bachelor's thesis about the negative attitudes of school headmasters and form teachers towards pupils who return from special needs schools and want to continue their education in an ordinary school.

sions similar to those of teachers about the importance of education (*'People have to have primary education'*), but they could not explain how education could be beneficiary to themselves. My belief is that the reasons behind this phenomenon concerned the institution's main function being corrective; the emphasis was not on the primary education but control and protection, the resocialisation of adolescent girls with social problems. The schooling was thus a method of managing the residents. There were connections between education and the resocialisation of troubled young people that spring from the Soviet concept, which considers resocialisation as a process of teaching. This idea reappears later in the conceptions of the staff about their work and the aims of the institution.

#### 4.1.4. The Staff's Narratives of the Residents

In the introductory part of this chapter I underlined that what people think and talked about with each other is an important part of interaction. If we take the social constructionist notion that individuals are produced during interactions as the point of departure, the following description of the staff's narratives of the residents should be observed as relevant knowledge both about constructing girls' troublesomeness as well as the aims of the operation of the institution.

The favourite topic of most of the staff members in their discussions with me was their pupils. They preferred it to other topics, such as discussions about the managers, the school problems (what to do and how) or their own work procedures with the residents. However, this did not apply to the entire staff, there were also teachers and educators who spoke openly about their working practices with the residents and how they would like to see the school reorganised. The residents' personal histories was the most common topic in our free conversations. As they were telling about the case of X. or Y. the staff members characterised her in detail or attempted to find explanations to the girl's behaviour. In my field notes there are about a hundred such narratives of the staff members. They form the basis for the analysis I attempt in this chapter.

The stories and especially the characterisations of the girls were told during free conversations in very different situations starting from the occasional encounter (in shop line, for instance) and ending with long interviews.

These narratives tell not only about residents who were in K. School that time, but also about examples that were the most typical or, on the contrary, unique cases. The narratives greatly vary in the amount of details they provide. Some of them are brief remarks, such as the story of a former resident who was a very wise girl and tried to cope the best she could, but her mother was an alcoholic and some years later, after an unhappy marriage, she herself also started to drink.

There were four distinct characteristics in the staff's narratives about the residents. First of all, the staff spoke remarkably openly about the details of the residents' private lives and assessed their personalities, and secondly, they possessed a vast amount of information about the girls' private lives.

Thirdly, they had a firm belief in their own characterisations of the residents' personalities.

The fourth feature was the conviction in the opinion that institutions like the K. School are needed in Estonia. Most of the staff members were assured that the K. School is the best possible place for such girls, but there were also pedagogues who thought that not all the residents who were in K. at that time belonged there.

*"I think that some of our girls don't need such a strict regime of education. Their problems have more to do with their families than themselves. I think it is not right that they were referred here."*  
(I.I.A.c.)

When the staff members spoke about the residents they used quite similar techniques of narration. One feature was a characterisation of the residents in general, that is, what is common for 'this category of girls'. Another feature was giving an example of a resident or residents who were either typical or exceptional in comparison to a 'normal K. School pupil'. The third feature was telling the life story of a particular resident and her family, which the staff often sharply criticised. The fourth feature was telling stories about incidents and activities in the K. School.



The staff's attitudes towards the lives of the residents before they were sent to the institution followed the same general lines. The blame for the girls' problems was largely put on their parents and other adults responsible for their upbringing rather than the girls themselves. The majority of the staff members frequently expressed their feelings of pity towards the residents. They also spoke about the specifics of difficulties concerning adolescence and the impact of heredity on deviant behaviour.

As I mentioned earlier, the life stories of the girls previous to their arrival at the institution was one of the most preferred topics of the staff's narratives about the residents. These stories were told with a detailed narration of the girls' family backgrounds, and the parents were often harshly criticised. Sometimes the blaming of the parents went on even in front of the residents. The fact that staff members felt free to speak about a residents' families in front of them in a disrespectful manner is an example of typical institutional discourtesy. The often heard *'Why didn't your mother teach you that?'* I saw as extremely inconsiderate, and can well understand why the residents resorted to the offensive counter-question *'How should I know why she didn't?'* Moreover, one of the most common complaints of the residents concerned staff members saying 'bad things' about their parents. This was recognised by the management, who in turn reproached the mid- and low-level staff for such behaviour.

The oft-heard question of the staff quoted above indicates how closely they link the process of bringing up a child with teaching and learning. To socialise a child means to teach him/her. I return later to the notion of how the socialisation as an educative process is expressed in verbalised transference of skills and knowledge.

However, for now I stop at the staff' narratives about the lives of the residents before they came to the K. School. The following quotations are from my field notes and staff interviews:

*"J. had a very difficult childhood. Her mother is drug addict and also her grandmother is an alcoholic. She ran away from home many times when her mother had orgies in the house ..." (I.5.E.f.);*

*"P. had normal parents, but her father died in an accident when she was only a baby and her mother was left alone with two children. The grandparents took P's brother to live with them and brought him up. He is a very smart young man now. The mother moved to a big city with P. where the mother soon met a man and got remarried. But the guy was an alcoholic and taught her to drink, too... P. has a diagnosis. There is a suspicion that this man, whom she calls 'daddy', raped her. She never told about it happening, but there is reason to believe so. The living conditions at P.'s home are terrible. Every time when she comes back from a visit home, she has head lice or scabies. P. also has a younger brother from mother's second marriage, and he is sent to a boarding school .... P. is always worried about her family." (I.5.E.d.)*

*"L.'s mother died. She needs a lot of attention, but we don't have enough time for everyone. All the girls here need attention, for instance the twins — their mother died when they were born, so they never had their own mother and grew up in a children's home." (I.5.E.c.)*

Stepfathers appear to be another problem connected with home that the staff speaks a lot about.

*"Mothers don't want give up those men. I don't know why are they so much attached to those men. They are better off sending the child away from home. This happens especially when there are conflicts between the stepfather and the child, and even more so if the stepfather is much younger than the mother. ... There are also cases when the stepfather sexually abuses the girl." (I.11.K.a.)*

The staff recognises that the residents' life in general has been difficult, sometimes even painful because of family relations. Only one staff member expressed her disbelief that the residents' hard childhood was the reason of their behavioural problems:

*"... I had a very painful childhood. Maybe if it wasn't so difficult I'd think that our girls are victims of a hard life. But I know from my own experience that a difficult childhood can work the opposite way and make a person very diligent and decent..." (I.2.B.b.)*

However, the residents are assessed mostly quite critically when the staff talks about their lives and behaviour inside the institution. As a

rule these are stories about the breaking of school rules, organising escapes or getting into trouble in other ways. The first story I heard on my very first day at the institution, for instance, was a story about how the Russian girls had organised a collective escape from the school:

*"It happened on a Saturday when the girls go to sauna. The Russian girls made sure they had the last turn. When they went to sauna, it was already dark. The idea was that at first the new girls should run away and the older girls — the originators — pretended that they would go after the runaways, catch them and bring them back. We know very well how such things are organised. It was P. who organised the whole thing, she is a very bad girl, by no means is she going to submit to the school regime."* (I.I.A.a.)

The staff's assessment of the residents varied according to what particular phase of the girls' lives they referred to; before, in or after the institution. When the topic was the home circumstances, especially in a case of a troubled family, the tone was generally compassionate towards the girls and accusatory towards the parents. When the staff spoke about the future prospects of the girls, they expressed worry and concern. However, when the topic of talk was the residents' behaviour at the institution, the assessment was negative.

The most typical characterisations of the residents given by the staff were the following.

First, from the staff's point of view, especially if the staff member is also a schoolteacher, the most important qualities of the residents were their intellectual capacity that is demonstrated in their ability to learn:

*"They do poorly in their studies," "They can not understand anything", "Their logical thinking ability is very low now"* (I.)

The intellectual backwardness is explained by the staff as a result of parental negligence and the fact that the girls have not attended school for a long time.

Second, besides the intellectual characterisation, an important topic of the staff's narratives was the residents' relationship with cleanliness and order:



*"Oh, they are so slipshod", "I told her several times that she has to wash herself, but she is such a dirty girl", "Yes, we make them clean their rooms all the time, but if we didn't do that, they'd never tidy up, they are just so very lazy! Yes, their nerves are also shot".*  
(I.)

For this sin of messiness, the staff was prone to blame the parents who did not teach the girls to keep their surroundings neat and clean.

Third, a common complaint was that the residents showed no gratitude:

*"They are never satisfied with anything. You can give them everything, but it is never enough." "You can give them your whole soul and they'll spit on it." (I.)*

Fourth, a very typical characterisation was that the girls were always lying. This was emphasised as an expressly female trait (about the gender issue see more in chapter 5.4.):

*"You shouldn't believe them, they are not used to tell the truth", "They tell you whatever comes to mind", "You never know when they are cheating you", "Boys are more honest. You can trust them more. ... But a girl can promise you God knows what looking you straight in the eye, but in reality you can never know what is in her mind. ...", "They will use you for their own benefit." (I.)*

Fifth, this kind of general characterisation also included some infantile qualities:

*"They are always expecting presents", "They like ice cream and candy", "They like holidays and parties", "They are like children, ... in fact they are children." (I.)*

Sixth, some of the residents were described as spoilt and pretentious:

*"She thinks everything should be exactly as she wants!", "At home she got used to getting anything she wanted and now she gets upset by this situation". (I.)*

Seventh, a new issue was the residents' health. It appears that after the restoration of independence, the residents tend to get ill more

often. *"We've never had as many sick girls as now."* The health problems were mostly of a psycho-neurological nature, which the staff connected with increasingly difficult life circumstances of families, such as growing poverty and stress that are reflected in children. (About this problem see chapter 4.1.5.)

The problems of the residents listed as they appear in the narratives of the staff are tied with the general official objectives of the K. School, and to some extent explain the difficulty of the staff's work. The main aim of the institution is to provide the girls with primary education. It is evident that a pupil who has a low intellectual capacity and is seen as backward is difficult to teach. Certain problems of a biochemical origin, such as some health problems, which are difficult or impossible to change, were often mentioned. One interesting explanation given for the girls' problems and qualities was their gender. In the narratives of the staff, girls the same age as the K. School residents have specific qualities that can not be changed, but only controlled.

The other points are tied with someone else's work that was poorly done. Parents, particularly mothers, did not teach their daughters to behave themselves, take care of their personal hygiene or keep their living environment tidy.

How to teach a neurotic adolescent with a low intellectual capacity and who is neglected by her parents? Too many mistakes were made with those girls, they are too difficult to cope with, it is impossible to teach them. The emphasis that the staff puts on these kinds of difficulties can be perceived as underlining the hardship of their work. Moreover, they must keep in mind that they are dealing with children who need nurturing like any other children.

A very important topic in these narratives was the future prospects of the residents. In this regard, the staff was very sceptical and spoke with fatalistic resignation: *"What can we do? We can only hope that everything will go well."* One teacher characterised the girls' future prospects in a following way:

*"Their fate is like this: only one-third has any family to go to. One-tenth will get a job, one-tenth will marry and all will be well. But the others? Who wants them? Who needs them?..."* (I.2.B.d.)

It was a general opinion among the staff that nobody needs or wants the residents after they leave. This not only justified their work with the girls, but also gave it a high value. The staff saw that the time the girls spent at the school was the happiest time of their life because the institution provided them with the ingredients for a happy childhood: food, clothes, warmth and rooms — in a word, 'home'. The girls who did have a family of her own needed to be controlled in the institutional environment of the K. School because of their 'stormy adolescence'.

To conclude the staff's narratives about the residents, two main approaches can be found.

- Understanding the residents as children. They are victims of circumstances, bad living environment, family background, parental neglect, and biochemical processes whose futures are at risk.
- Discontent with the result of the circumstances, that is, with their character and behaviour that is problematic requires correction.

#### 4.1.5. A New Kind of Resident

The staff mentioned that the current residents were different than previous years. Two extracts from interviews with teachers demonstrate how the population of the school has changed:

1.

*"We've never had so many seriously disturbed girls as nowadays. There were difficult girls before too, but they were just behaving badly. Now you cannot understand what's the matter with them. And the adults have to respond to them somehow. Take A. for instance, she is absolutely irresponsible and unmanageable. Yes, the girls now are so very high-strung. A. reacts so ferociously to the slightest problem..."*

*Then, her functional literacy skills are very poor. She can't understand anything. She can memorise, but thinking logically is very hard for her..."*

*They cannot understand why they have to study. Some of them even think that they are too smart..."*



*Before, the girls were older and we had a secondary school — they had a different level of ability. Now, they are much younger and have many gaps in their knowledge, they are incapable and inadequate...*

*Domestic circumstances have an impact on the children as well. If their parents are unemployed or have lots of other problems they can't cope even with their own lives and have no energy to take care of their children..." (I.12.G.a.)*

2.

*"You know this new girl? Can you imagine, she is twelve and doesn't know anything about the seasons! She can't read a thing...*

*I thought I would like to attend a course for elementary school teachers because I don't know what methods to use in teaching this kind of a backward child. I am just an ordinary school teacher... Previously, we had smart girls ... They were also older: the average age was fifteen to sixteen years, but now some girls are only ten. What can you do with them? Now, P. is the only clever one, but she is very disturbed. I don't know how she will cope with her life in the future. She uses drugs." (I.7.L.a.)*

The staff narratives indicate the following differences in the characteristics of residents. Residents

- are younger than before
- have more health problems
- are neglected
- have low intellectual capacity
- have a low educational level
- are backward children
- have no motivation to study
- possibly use drugs.

This list moves the emphasis on the personal responsibility of the adolescents to a different dimension. Something (illness) or somebody else (parents, community, school, the child protection system, the whole process of social changes in the independent Estonia, etc.) is responsible for the girls' troublesome behaviour. All of this is the basis for the new attitude of the staff towards the residents. These girls are not guilty, but they are victims. When a child has behav-

itorial problems ('they were just behaving badly'), the teacher, using pedagogical methods, can discipline her. If she is a victim she evokes compassion, but for whatever reason, they are *a l s o* 'bad girls' and "*nobody was sent here without reason*".

Hence, on the one hand the girls are not responsible for being disturbed, but on the other hand their behaviour is deviant. As victims they have to be protected and cared for, as offenders they have to be punished, and when they are ill, they need medical treatment. The teachers and educators are not trained to deal with an ill, neurotic child who has been neglected by her alcoholic parents, and who is now torturing other girls, organising break-outs from the school and wreaking other havoc.

Children with learning difficulties also require knowledge and skills which 'an ordinary school teacher' does not possess. The staff has no training in dealing with drug users. (On the new kind of residents and the changing of staff attitudes concerning this see also Strömpl 2000: 33–34).

The data I produced between October 1993 and April 1994 at the K. Special Needs School for my master's thesis demonstrated how rapidly the changes in the residents' specific characteristics had taken place<sup>12</sup>. The material is based on the semi-structured interviews of 58 residents (Strömpl 1995: 31–2).

The average age of residents in 1993–1994 was 15 (40%) and 14 (26%), and the youngest resident was 12 years old (ibid.: 31). In 1997, the largest age group was 14 (39%) and 13 (30%) and the two youngest residents were 10 years old.

In 1993–94, the residents described their problems at school before being sent to the K. Special Needs School as learning difficulties, bad school reports and skipping school, whereas in 1997 the biggest problem with schooling was school truancy (a long-term ab-

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<sup>12</sup> The two research databases are difficult to compare due to being produced by different methods. I did not gather quantitative data in 1997 and hence can not provide the exact percentages of that time. The aim of the comparison is to grasp the general picture about the changes in the institution's population. However, the reasons for the change must be left somewhat open in this connection. It would be interesting to study whether the perceived changes are to some extent due to increased awareness of the social factors as the underlying cause of the girls' problems.

sence from school). In other words, individual problems at school were replaced with serious gaps in education or no schooling at all.

The third dramatic change that came up in comparing the two databases was that in 1993–94 the girls reported smoking cigarettes (81%), drinking alcohol (40%), using toxic substances (35%), and illegal drugs (9%) (*ibid.*: 53–4), but by 1997 the problem of drug abuse had risen to serious proportions.

Summing up the representation of the residents, I want to underline the significance of the two approaches: how the girls present themselves; and how they are represented by the other participants of the interactive processes — the staff. As a result of the representation, it became evident that the underlying reasons for the problems of the residents extend far beyond their personal deeds and behaviour. The girls need special education because of a wide range of intricate social problems, family relationships and problems concerning their health and education. Especially the staff's introduction of the 'new type' of resident demonstrates that these trouble-making delinquents are more often children amidst a multiplicity of problems. Both the residents' self-presentation and the portrayal of them given by the staff show in detail the difficulties of making a definition of residents in an institution like the K. Special Needs School. Behind the official definition of residents as young females who 'need strict education' are neglected, sick children who were left for a long time to struggle alone with their problems. **They are first of all victims of their families, schools, community and society in general, which takes action only when such children seriously begin to disturb other people's peace though their actions.** The understanding that these children are victims themselves began to influence the staff's attitude and replace the notion of management with the concept of care. However, the staff's representation of the residents can also be characterised as a representation of **objects** whom the staff control, assess and care for; towards whom they feel compassion and sadness, and whom they have to teach, educate and bring up.



## 4.2. Reconstructing the Staff

The other significant group of actors in institutional interactions are the staff members. The K. Special Needs School staff consists of the management, mid-level, and low-level staff. During my fieldwork period, the management constituted of five people: the headmaster, three vice-heads who were respectively responsible for teaching, education and housing, and an inspector. The mid-level staff consisted of school teachers (13), educators at the dormitory (10), workshop instructors (7), a nurse and a physician. There were teachers who were also educators, and some people acted in as many as three functions: teachers, workshop instructors and educators. Many of the former vocational instructors whose original workload had decreased because of the reorganisation of the school in 1990 also had another role as educators. The management, except for the inspector and the head of housing, were also teachers. Out of 10 teachers, one worked also as an educator and a workshop instructor, and three others were also educators. All of the workshop instructors worked as educators. In other words, there were only two full-time educators who were not also workshop instructors. However, this kind of a brief description of the staff does not correspond well with reality, because an important characteristics of the school in terms of staff was precisely the rapid changes in the consistency and number of the staff. During my fieldwork, several substitutes were hired to replace personnel on sick leave. Moreover, such occasional workers as myself, the above-mentioned special education student and a young woman from the K. village worked there. The young woman from the village was a shop assistant by training and at the time on maternity leave. She explained that her grandmother took care of her one-year-old baby while she had the chance to earn a little extra money by working as an educator at the institution. In May, a new full-time educator was hired on permanent basis. The more or less stable pedagogical body of personnel consists of 23 people including the management.

The guards of the institution were part of the administrative staff. They were responsible for keeping the school grounds locked and, literally, held the keys to the buildings and the gate. The guards were the ones on duty at night on the dormitory floors, and also the

residents in the isolation room were also under the responsibility of the guards. There were also a librarian, a bookkeeper, a cashier and other support personnel such as a bursar, cooks and other kitchen personnel, a carpenter and a driver. They had only occasional contacts with the residents. Except for one member of the administrative personnel, all of the staff members who dealt directly with the residents were female.

Staff members often had lengthy sick leaves. During the time I spent at the institution, six educators were on a sick leave; one for three months, another for two months, and the rest for 2–3 weeks. Former teachers or educators who were already retired usually substituted for people on sick leave or other temporary leaves.

After the school was reorganised from being a vocational institute to offering only primary education, many of the former vocational instructors began working as educators in order to have a full-time job. To find work in a small village like K. is hard, if not impossible. This is also the main reason why so many staff members have stayed at the institution for such a long time. The staff's working hours were long. There were some staff members who started their working day at school giving lessons, continued as instructors in the workshops, and spent their evenings at the dormitory as educators. It is not surprising that such a workload in such an institution is accompanied by burn-out and other various health problems. There is reason to add that the institution offered no support or facilities for the staff to restore their emotional, intellectual and physical well-being.

All the 'old' pedagogical staff who had worked at the K. School already during the Soviet era had higher university education. The workshop instructors, former vocational instructors, also had a higher technical degrees. During the Soviet time, the educators at the institution were also required to have a degree in pedagogy. However, currently there are no professional requirements for the educators. The educators during my fieldwork period were mostly former vocational instructors who had a long experience of working with troubled children, but all of them felt frustrated and complained about not having adequate pedagogical training. The high esteem given to pedagogical education was connected with the So-

viet emphasis on pedagogical professionalism in working with young people in general, and with children with special needs in particular.

#### 4.2.1. The Staff Members Introduce Themselves

The stories about how people ended up in working in the K. School are a significant part of the staff members' representation of themselves. In both my interviews of the staff members and free conversations with them I asked on what grounds did they choose their jobs and what motivated them. Most of the people simply replied that the institution provides flats for its staff. The stories of the long-time workers often demonstrate the importance of having a flat of one's own after finishing university education and starting out in professional careers:

*"I came here by chance. What chance? There gave me a flat, that's why I came here."* (I.2.B.a.)

*"I was a young teacher just starting my professional career. Me and my husband were newly married and had no place to live. Here I was offered a flat."* (I.16.P.a.)

*"After getting divorced I had no place to go to. Than I found out about this school."* (I.3.C.a.) *"I don't know if it was my fate that threw me here or what. I needed a flat."* (I.8.H.a.)

The headmistress started in her job at the time of the reorganisation of the special needs school in 1990. She explained that she thought she was chosen over other candidates because she agreed to come and live in K.

The flat plays an important role also in continuing the work after the institution was reorganised:

*"Before I worked as a master (vocational instructor) both at the old school and the new one. Now there is no work and that's why I was sent to be an educator at the dorm ... I am not alone — all former masters work both as masters and educators... I have no pedagogical training but only a higher technical education, but in here this doesn't matter. ... It is bad to live here in K. Our flats*



*are inadequate and not ours. The money (salary) is not good. If somebody wants to earn proper money, they'd better find another place... The work is heavy — our girls are difficult ...". (I.5.E.a.)*

An interesting phenomenon is tied with working for a long time at the institution. Many staff members talked about their discontent with the work at the institution as seen in the quotation above. Many teachers and educators spoke about their dream to leave K. and look for other work. However, at the same in some of their narratives appeared the theme of finding a good short-term job from which they could return to the K. School. What is the reason to commit a person so tightly to the institution? I did not find an unanimous answer to this intriguing question. Someone explained it by habit, whereas someone else said that it was too late to change jobs at that point and that she had no skills for any other job. Others simply said that they do not understand the reason themselves<sup>13</sup>.

Who are they?

When the staff of the K. School spoke generally about the qualities of institutional staff such as in their own school, they mostly referred to something they saw as an ideal. The most frequently used words in texts where a staff member, regardless of their status at the school, spoke about the qualities and requirements for special needs school pedagogues were such as 'must', 'have to', and 'should'. The valued personal qualities of a good teacher/educator in a special needs school above all were goodness, warm-heartedness, self-sacrifice and such.

(M.=a manager, I= me)

*"M.: You understand that this is a special needs school and this means we also need special people (as staff).*

*I.: What do you mean by special?*

*M.: I mean they have to love the girls, they have to put their whole hearts in the work. They have to be like mothers to the girls.*

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<sup>13</sup> Nobody directly referred to the feeling of desertion which I felt as I was leaving the institution. Even though it is clear that the work is extremely hard and has little effect, there is never the feeling of not being needed. The question is of a reciprocal dependency: the residents depend you to satisfy their needs because of their own limited status, and this in return gives the feeling of importance and, evidently, also the feeling of power.

*These are personal qualities that can not be taught. I believe that the most important thing is to be a good person and training comes second. These girls need a lot of love."* (I.6.F.b.)

Quite similar conceptions were expressed by a Russian teacher:

*"... because it is only possible to get any results with the girls by personal example. Experienced teachers are needed, experienced pedagogues who are enthusiastic, even fanatical about their work. We don't need people who keep watching the clock and wait for their duties to be over so they can get home..... The personnel here must have a heart of a mother. Indifference is not accepted here. Human qualities are needed."* (I.7.L.b.)

Another issue connected to this was fervently discussed among the staff members: the question of special needs training. Opinions concerning this were contradictory. On the one hand, those staff members who had no special pedagogical training complained that they did not feel competent and confident in their work because of this, and on the other hand all staff members unanimously emphasised the importance of the time factor in learning this work: *"Three years is the minimum time to understand anything in our line of work... Only long-term experience can give you the right skills for this job."* (I)

Thus, according to the staff, the most important qualities for working with such a group of young people are personal qualities and a long-term experience. Various managerial and mid-level staff members stressed the importance of rationally inexplicable phenomena, such as inherent pedagogical talent, intuition, sensitivity, and talent for presentiment and anticipation, but not professional skills acquired by training. Moreover, these 'talents' could not be developed even with long-term practice. There were some staff members who had worked at the institution for a long time but lacked pedagogical talent in the assessments of others and therefore were not seen as performing well in their work. One explanation of this preference for personal qualities over professional training can be found in the general opinion that there were certain pedagogues with a higher education who did not cope well with the residents because of their lack of 'goodness of heart'. This was also seen as a

living proof of the belief that such skills that are needed in the K. School are impossible to learn theoretically.

Perhaps the fact that the number of the so-called 'new type' of residents has rapidly increased accounts on its part for the emphasis on the humane qualities of the workers. Traditional pedagogical training does not correspond with the needs of the girls any more, particularly because the residents' behaviour is seen as incomprehensible it is expressly 'motherly care' and compassion that are needed, and trained skills have become obsolete<sup>14</sup>.

#### 4.2.2. Relations Between the Staff Members on Different Levels

The mid-level staff stressed good relationships between colleagues as one positive side of this work. I had the opportunity to collect my own experiences on this. Despite my unusual way of coming to the institution, the teachers and educators were friendly and helpful towards me. Some of them did not want to recognise my role as a researcher, but as a new staff member I was accepted very soon and felt at home among my 'colleagues' (compare with Coffey 1999). During the fieldwork period, I came to consider myself as a member of the staff. I was one party in the staff relationships in the role of a mid-level staff member.

The relationships between the management and the mid-level staff were the most interesting. These were expressed generally in mutual expectations toward one another. The headmistress, for instance, described what kinds of activity she expects from the educators in the following quotation:

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<sup>14</sup> It is also possible that in the changed situation, where the traditional pedagogical training is not adequate to cope with the girls, a new type of training is needed. However, the staff never mentioned this possibility. Obviously, professionals with new, more suitable training would threaten the present staff's position if they were to be trained. Moreover, with the constant need for substitute workers, it was in the staff's interests to hire formally unqualified people to ensure their own status as the old, experienced workers. It should be kept in mind that this is my own interpretation and based on personal feelings that only emerged while I was observing the staff's activities.



*"The staff has to put all their knowledge and skills to benefit the girls. I want them to share their lives and teach them everything they know. But, unfortunately, we have many old educators. They were here already during the Russian times and they want to go on exactly as before ... For instance, one educator had to accompany the girls to do some gardening. But she went and put on white high-heeled shoes. What work could she do in the garden? She could only give commands. The girls don't like that. It makes them protest. An educator should help the girls in everything they do. She should be a person who teaches, explains, does things together with them. An educator should act according to what the child needs. Unfortunately an educator's 'self' dominates often..." (I.4.D.a.)*

The mid-level staff members, in turn, expressed their expectations to the management which were quite similar: the head should participate more in the school life: *"Have you seen her participating in our school activities? Never."* However, when I asked some other mid-level staff members about their opinion of the management, most of them (especially the Russians) refused to answer my questions and said that it is not their business what and why the managers do things. Despite the good personal relationships between the staff members, in terms of work itself they can be generally characterised as having a certain indifference or separateness to them. Everyone worked on their own and in their own way. There was a tacit agreement not to intervene in others' work, which is difficult to put into words. No educator dealt with residents from other groups than their own and everyone was supposed to solve their own problems, or problems of their residents, by herself or with the girls in her group. A colleague of mine was very surprised when I recommended her to discuss the case of a very difficult resident with Finnish professionals in L. She answered that it is a great shame on us if we cannot deal with this girl ourselves, and it is not fair to speak to other people about such problems.

The staff took the difficulties concerning their work too personally. Whatever the causes for this were, whether too great of a work load or a lack of trust to others, nobody interfered with the business of others. This did not mean that the staff members did not help each other. For instance, if somebody had to go to town, she could ask another teacher or educator to take over for her group for a while

and people also changed shifts with one another when necessary. However, joint problem-solving was not customary. Once when I was asked by one of the managers to participate in finding a solution to a problem that did not directly concern my own group, the other educator from my group was indignant: *"Why should you deal with this problem? It didn't happen in our group! Let X and Y solve their problems themselves!"* (I.10.J.) Also, when X found out that there was going to be a discussion about an incident that happened in her group, she clearly showed how discontented she was with me for daring to interfere in other people's business. I felt at the time that I had broken an unwritten law.

The above-mentioned 'indifference' was most apparent in the relationships between the Estonian and the Russian staff. (About this more in detail see chapter 4.3.)

Both the Russian and Estonian mid-level staff were critical of the management. However, their ways of expressing this differed a lot from each other. The Russian staff members simply refused to talk about or discuss the question of management, but they had their own ways of silently demonstrating their discontent, whereas the Estonian staff more or less openly criticised the management. However, there were also people who were afraid to talk and only did so after begging me not to repeat their words to anyone.

#### 4.2.3. The Residents Present the Staff

The Estonian residents call the staff by their position 'teacher' ('õpetaja'), 'educator' ('kasvataja'), or 'instructor' ('meister'). The guards (administrative workers) are called 'regime' ('rezhiim'). The Russian residents call the Russian pedagogues by both their first name and patronymic, but to some teachers they have given a nickname formed from their patronymic, such as Andreichik from Andrejevna. When the Russian girls spoke to an Estonian staff member, they used the Estonian terms of status; such as, 'kasvataja'. The physician and the nurse were talked to in the same fashion; they were called the 'arstike'/'arstika' which is a nickname from the Estonian word for 'doctor' = 'arst'. An especially funny and lovely pet name was combined from the first part of the Estonian word 'puusepp' (car-

penter) and the Russian suffix '-ik'. This 'puusik' referred to the carpenter — one of the four male members of the staff.

The creation of such lovely pet names demonstrates that the residents relate emotionally to the personnel. Most of the residents' narratives told about the feeling of the lack of staff. In general, the residents were willing to communicate with the staff, if not at all times. However, they had their own favourites and shunned away from certain people.

The most important characteristic of individual staff members in the girls' narratives was their trustworthiness in the eyes of the girls. Remarks like 'I don't believe her' expressed the level of this worthiness of the person. Trustworthiness, however, was a phenomenon constructed by the staff itself. To be a trustworthy person in eyes of the residents was the most important quality in a staff member, because it indicated the girls' willingness to listen and be influenced by that person. The residents were well aware of this importance and, in my belief, sometimes used expressions of distrust as a weapon of revenge against some staff member or another for her wrongdoing. Conversations with the residents made quite clear who were the staff members to be trusted. Among their favourites, the girls named staff members they saw as adults who took them seriously, communicated with them with ease, were not manipulative and did not judge or appraise them. The residents highly valued calmness in the staff, too much emotional fuss irritated them. However, they were able to recognise suppressed anger. Even aggressiveness was preferred to indifference. Those staff members who were consistent in their behaviour and held on to school rules were also very highly valued. The residents used the populist methods of some staff members to their own advantage, but in reality did not respect them too much for it.

The residents both recognised and acknowledged the difficult nature of the staff's work in general. At times they expressed their doubts about why the staff come voluntarily to work in such a 'terribly bad' place as the K. School is. There had to be something wrong with the people who apply for a job there. Either she is in a real bad condition, or has some special needs such as a desperate need for a place to stay that forces her to take on such work. One



example sheds some light on what the residents thought about the staff.

When I first met my group and introduced myself, the girls were surprised at my name which is a little exotic for Estonia. *'Why do you have such an unusual name?'* they asked. I explained. Then the girls asked about the names of my children, and after that matter was cleared followed the next question: *'And what is the name of your ex-husband?'* I was surprised that they should ask about my ex-husband and expressed it. Their answer was that *'married women don't come to work here!'* This exchange gives an important insight into how the residents view the staff. It would be interesting to find out what the girls actually mean by the last sentence. Does it mean that divorced women usually need accommodation? Or does it mean that a divorced woman is miserable? The residents have a lot of personal divorce stories in their families. For these girls, to be a successful woman means being married. The school itself constructs an image about a happy future life for the residents as being married. Divorce for a woman means loneliness, and a lonely woman can not be successful. The meaning of happiness and the misery of women's lives were issues lively discussed at the institution. However, this had more to do with the more recently arrived staff members. The residents' attitudes towards the 'old' staff members were quite different. There was a lot of mutual blame that involved the 'old' staff and the residents.

The residents, like the management, expected more self-sacrifice from the staff. Russian residents in particular expressed this often. A good teacher or educator was one who spent a lot of time with the girls and was committed to them, and the best ones were those who were willing to talk and discuss with them as much as possible.

To summarise the residents' introduction of the staff, they were represented as people who must be a little bit 'crazy' to come and work in a such an unpleasant place where 'normal' people do not come voluntary. Despite that, the girls understood how hard this work could be, partly because the residents themselves demanded a lot particularly from the mid-level staff. They expect self-sacrifice and sharing of one's whole life with them. The most important demand is communication.

### 4.3. Reconstructing Ethnic Relations: the Estonian and Russian Sectors

One-third of the residents are Russian-speaking and they form their own community. The proportion between Estonians and Russians corresponds with the proportion between the Estonian and Russian (or Russian-speaking) population in the Estonian society. However, there was a relative increase in the amount of Russian girls among the newcomers to the K. Special Needs School during my fieldwork, which indicated the tendency of young Russian people having more problems than Estonian. Most probably this reflects the fact that there are deeper social problems in Northwest Estonia and Tallinn, where the majority of the Russian population lives.

The relations between the two ethnic groups at the institutions are perhaps most aptly characterised as a docile indifference, which from time to time is enlivened by either indignant accusations or expressions of fear towards each other. The attitude of always expecting the other side to take the first step towards getting closer is preferred.

In general, both Estonians and Russians accept the policy of separating the two groups from each other. In my research material, this was expressed in the emphasis on the 'national differences' between the two nations, as the following extract of a teacher's interview demonstrates:

*"I think this idea of a two-language school is no good for anything. The differences in temperaments are too large. Russians with their aggressive behaviour need more space for themselves, they oppress Estonians and Estonians don't like that. ..."* (I.12.G.a.)

The opinion on the Russian temperament is a widespread myth among Estonians in general. However, during my stay at the institution it was the Russian residents who caused much more trouble for the staff in comparison with the Estonian residents. They arranged collective escapes, refused to submit to the school rules and smirked at learning and participation in vocational training. In brief, they objected to and protested against everything possible. Staff members pointed out that the Russian group of girls had a strong leader, a girl with multiple problems including drug abuse, who successfully

stirred the other girls to trouble. Because of such strong leadership, the Russian subculture was also much stronger than the Estonian girls' subculture.

In spite of the above-mentioned differences in the so-called national Estonian and Russian characteristics, the relationships between the Estonian and Russian residents were quite peaceful. One staff member explained that this depended on the personal relationship between the leaders of the two groups:

*"The relationship between the Estonians and Russians (residents) depend upon the relationship between the leaders of the two groups. It seems to me that they are good at the moment. The Russian leader speaks Estonian language well and the Estonian leader likes her a lot."* (I.12.G.a.)

In her interview, the same staff member explained the aggressive behaviour of the Russian girls as expressions of discontent, for instance, with the school rules and unjust treatment. In my field notes, there is a description of a meeting organised by the Russian girls where I happened to be present<sup>15</sup>. During the meeting the girls discussed organising a strike: they decided not to go to school. I asked the reason for their discontent. They said that the Russian girls were seriously discriminated against. At first, they complained about Estonian residents having better bedrooms, receiving more presents from the school, and being allowed more field trips, such as going to the swimming pool.

*"We are always punished. We are not allowed to go to the swimming pool, to the theatre, or to any events or happenings outside the school. For example, I've never been to the swimming pool, and I am a Fish (in the horoscope) and I need water! But why don't they take me there? Because I have bad marks!"* (III.5.S.)

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<sup>15</sup> I found it interesting that the Russian girls let me stay in the room where the meeting took place, which I first entered by chance. One of the organisers told another: "N., give a chair to the educator!" After that she explained me that they were going to declare a strike the following day. I never quite understood why they let me stay and listen, but took it as a supporting fact to the notion that the girls were very keen to have contact with the staff whenever possible.



One issue of complaint was a remark a staff member had made to them: *"You breathe Estonian air!"* The meeting started with the term 'ethnic discrimination', but quite soon the girls moved on to general problems in the institution: bad sanitary conditions, rats and mice, the lack of good staff and the negative influence the school had on their mental state:

*"And what kind of stupid guys we become here! When I was on a holiday I wanted to buy an ice cream, but when it was my turn I couldn't get a word out of my mouth. I left without buying anything." (III.5.O.)*

In reality, the Russian girls did make more trouble compared to the Estonians, and were consequently punished more often. Punishment mostly meant restrictions of privileges. It appeared that any form of possible discrimination was connected to the insufficient number of Russian staff, as well as their working practices and methods in general.

Russian staff members were few: two teachers, two workshop instructors who were also educators and three full-time educators, one of which was on sick leave for the whole semester. Two people were temporarily employed as educators: an already retired former educator who was employed for one month, and myself for a semester. The situation was grim: there were only six to seven workers for 30–35 Russian residents. Some subjects at the school were taught to both groups by Estonian teachers (German language, Estonian language, singing, painting and gymnastics), and the other subjects were divided between the two Russian teachers; one taught social studies and the humanities, and the other natural sciences. The educators for one form were all Estonian and one of them spoke practically no Russian. Except for one teacher and myself, no one from the Russian staff spoke Estonian. It was quite surprising to learn that it was possible to work in an institution that was run in the Estonian language and where the majority of both the staff and residents were Estonians without using the Estonian language.

Passing an Estonian language test was a precondition for receiving citizenship, and hence also the Russian staff in the K. School had to have studied it to some extent<sup>16</sup>.

I believe that the fact the Estonian girls caused less trouble and were more willing to cooperate with the staff can not be explained by some ethnic quality. I saw it more as a result of the Estonian staff's working practices. The Estonian pedagogues were generally more responsive to the girls and their needs than the Russian staff. The gap between the Russian staff and the Russian girls was deeper. The girls told me there was only one Russian teacher who cared about them, while the Estonian staff cares for their girls much more.

The Estonian staff demonstrated their responsiveness and willingness to be in the girls' company by concretely participating in the daily activities. I noted how the Estonian staff really **did** something **together** with the residents. When the girls wanted to replace furniture in their bedroom, the educator assembled the furniture together with them. The Russian staff's working practices were different, and in a similar situation they were supervising the work without actively participating in it. However, I want to emphasise that the pedagogical methods of the Russian staff members did not mark a less compassionate attitudes towards the residents, but that they tended to direct their frustration towards the residents more. When a Russian staff member was depressed or frustrated, she expressed it as anger or indifference towards the residents, while the Estonian staff was more inclined to protest to the management.

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<sup>16</sup> One Russian teacher told me about the language test she had to pass to receive Estonian citizenship: "I am really sorry that I didn't learn Estonian when I had the chance. It is true that I had to pass the language test to receive my citizenship, and I did study very hard at it. I did pass, but a year after the test I couldn't remember a word. It's too bad I didn't learn it when I was younger and my head worked better. But you know how it is. We people in the service (her husband was a Soviet army officer) were sent to different places all the time and when we first came I didn't think we'd stay for long."

#### 4.3.1. Two Types of Russian Staff Attitudes

Among the Russian staff members, it was possible to make a distinction between two types of general attitudes towards the residents, their work and the institution in general. One can be characterised as a generally passive attitude that included self-exclusion from any form of collective work, reluctance to actively approach the residents, scepticism, pessimism and hopelessness. Staff members with this kind of an attitude of Russian staff members related with the residents without any enthusiasm. They performed the tasks expected from them, such as supervision, helping the girls with their homework and preparing some common school activities, but showed no initiative of their own to get in a closer contact with the girls. One Russian staff member spoke about her disappointment with girls who she believed could not be trusted: *"One moment you can feel how close she is to you, and that you can trust her, and the next you know is that she's duping you."*

Another Russian staff member explored her passivity in the following story of her disillusionment:

*"And what about our managers, they are also... If you just could have seen our old headmaster's end. She was old, already totally collapsed and we were fast going down with her. But she just hung on to her post by tooth and nail. It was a real disaster! At that time the National Front functioned also here and some women at the school who were more active in it went and finally got her out. Yes, and then the new headmaster came. ... Well, after that we were the ones blamed for tying the old headmaster up ... That's why, you know, I keep my mouth shut. Let them decide and do what they want. I'm not going to interfere. And I give you a piece of advice: if you want to work here, you better keep silent. This goes especially for us. ..."* (I.5.E.d.)

How much bitterness there is in these words. The educator's personal experiences had proved to her that being active and showing initiative bring punishment rather than any positive results. It is interesting to compare this attitude with the current headmaster's remark on the 'old-timers', the 'Russian-time staff', as she usually refers to them *"However, these old staff members are very dutiful. If*



*you tell them something, they do it just as instructed.*" In my belief, this *"do just as instructed"*, expresses the alienation of the Russian staff members from both the management and the residents, that is, from their work in general. This raises the question of why this is the case mostly with the Russian staff members? There are lot of Estonian personnel who demonstrate protest rather than indifference towards their work.

This disillusionment is also connected with nearly a fatalistic belief among the Russian staff that it is impossible to change the girls' personalities and behaviour, or anything at all to that matter:

*"Why do you worry so much about S? Can't you see, she is quite successful in achieving what she wants. Don't worry about her, she will be successful after leaving the school. ...Anyway, do you really think it is possible to change something?" (I.5.E.b.)*

Nevertheless, this same staff member expressed her belief that the school is needed, because there the girls are protected from the influence of their criminal friends, can not use drugs and have the opportunity to go to school. Control over the girls was the most important thing for the Russian staff. By control they primarily meant 'keeping an eye on the girls'.

Another staff member complained that the girls and the work had become extremely difficult. I asked her why she stayed. She answered in the following way:

*"Where can I go now? There are no jobs at all in Estonia. I am used to do this work, I am used to live here in K. I don't know where else I could work. I have to earn some money. My family needs money. Somehow I have to hold out." (I.10.J.d.)*

Another type of the Russian staff attitude could be characterised as an active will to have a corrective influence on the girls, to teach them and to change them. The method of correction simply meant subordination to the demands of the staff. *"She will hold the girl for as long as it takes for her to learn today's lesson and give the correct answers."* At times, this learning referred to the mechanical cramming of the textbook. A lot of coercion went on in these kinds of situations. However, the residents always preferred it to the previously described indifferent attitude.

The more the staff demonstrated passive omission, the more the residents engaged in active protest. The Russian residents demanded more attention out loud. The residents expected greater self-sacrifice from the staff, more of their time and attention, and they acknowledge that they have to have someone deal with them always.

On the basis of my own experiences as an educator I knew how provocative the girls could be in their demand for attention and connection. They expected the person with them to be fully present in body and soul. This meant huge personal investment and constant self-scrutiny from the staff.

On the basis of all the above-mentioned it became evident that both the Russian residents and staff members were in great need of support. However, where should this help come from? The most obvious answer is the management and the Estonian part of the institution. However, this was not the case. Everything I could perceive spoke for a polite attitude of distance and never intervening in the business of others. A relationship of such kind demonstrates tolerance towards the other on the one hand, but on the other hand it is an example of rejection of integration which results in exclusion.

The following examples demonstrate the notion of separation and exclusion that prevailed in the institution.

First. A description of the educators' meeting. I interpreted the behaviour of the Russian staff as self-exclusion:

*"All the staff members were seated in a circle. However, two of the Russian staff members chose to sit outside the circle. During the entire meeting, they were engaged in a quiet conversation with each other. They did not disturb the meeting, but also did nothing to show any participation. The rest of the staff, including the manager who chaired the meeting, ignored them. Nobody asked them to come closer and join the rest of us." (III.1.2.)*

Second. Another scene of the educators' meeting when the Estonian staff members brought up the recent celebration of the Estonian Independence Day:

*"— What did you think about the Independence Day?  
— The ceremonial meeting was nice, but it was strange for the Russian girls. They felt themselves being pushed aside.*

— *The Russian girls have their own holidays. We have to let them to prepare something nice for their own holidays.*

— *But then the Estonian girls wouldn't pay any attention to that. We have to give this some thought!"*

*The topic was finished for the time being, but later one of the managers told me about one detail concerning the celebration which was not discussed openly in the meeting: 'During the celebration she (one of the Russian staff members) was sitting in the last row and corrected the pupils' books. This is her attitude. And that's what the girls can see. What are they supposed to think?' (III.1.3.)*

Third. An extract from the headmistress's interview demonstrates the construction of the other's ethnicity:

*"I only found out that I got this job two days before I was supposed to start.... I had never been here before, and I still don't know the old headmaster. I didn't even want to know what the school was like before my time. I certainly didn't want to be influenced by the old Russian way of doing things. ...I didn't want the old Russian times continuing. ...Of course, we still have staff members from the old Russian times who don't want to change, they cry for strict regime and more punishment... But they also have to keep up with the new times...." (I.4.D.a.)*

The characterisation of the institution before its reorganisation by both the Russian and Estonian staff were mostly similar (violent, authoritarian, punitive, strict, humiliating), but the Estonian staff transferred those attributes of the old system to cover the whole Russian national character. However, this was not clearly tied to any particular individuals of Russian nationality. For instance, the previous headmaster who embodied the 'Russian time' was Estonian by nationality. There were also Russian staff members about whom the new school ideologists spoke with warm words; people who really tried their best to care for the girls in those difficult time. Hence, probably the use of term 'Russian' concerning to the old time substitutes for the term 'Soviet'. Replacing the Soviet regime in speech with the term 'Russian' is a widespread phenomenon in Estonia, as well as in other places previously under Soviet rule.

However, for the Russian people there is a clear distinction between the terms 'Soviet' and 'Russian', even though at times the



confusion of terms appears also in their speech. For the Russian staff of the institution this substitution made sense in two different ways. Some identified themselves with the Soviet system and felt alien and rejected, which made them long for the lost 'good times'. Others see themselves as Russians with no identification with the Soviet system and feel unjustly excluded.

An extract from a Russian staff member interview displays a Russian nationalistic attitude:

*"The textbooks for the Russian school are awful. I don't think it's right that Russian children have to read Estonian textbooks simply translated into Russian. The history book, for instance, tells very little about the Decembrist movement. Russian children should know more about the history of Russia and the Russian nation. It is important for their education. Otherwise they will grow up as 'Van'kas who do not remember their ancestors'.*

*... I'd take Russian TV programmes anytime. There show good theatre performances. The Estonian TV is full of cheap soap operas."* (I.7.L.a.)

The negative view the quotation gives to Estonian school books and television is true to some extent. I agree that ethnic identity and historical memory is important in children's education. However, this discussion of ethnic education embeds an ethnocentric point of view, which may have a negative impact in such an institution as the K. School is.

Separation took place even where the basic care for the Russian girls was concerned:

*"We should repair some of the Russian girls' rooms, because they already keep complaining about how everything nice is only given to the Estonian girls. The Russian girls' rooms are really awful."* (I.1.A.b.)

Such a question as repairing rooms should not be connected to ethnic affiliation. Obviously, the solution would be to repair the rooms in terms of their condition regardless of who occupies them.

To summarise this chapter, it should be emphasised that the tendency towards separation came from both parts of the school. Both ethnic groups faced the demand to adapt to the new situation; how-

ever, both groups also expected the other part to begin the process of convergence. The phenomenon resembles the relationships and expectations that are apparent between the different levels of staff.

The Russian residents were the ones left to their own devices as the most rejected group for a combination of reasons connected to both their basic care and the working practices of the staff responsible for them.

In chapter 4 I attempted to present the actors of the activities in the K. School. They are divided into two groups: the residents who are the reason for the institution's existence, and the staff, whose task it is to teach and provide care for the residents. In this study, the activities of the institution are perceived as interactive processes. To fully understand these processes it is important to know how the actors represent themselves and the others. The following points are essential in this regard.

First, the residents' and the staff's representation of themselves and each other add an important factor to the knowledge about how the institution operates and what its impact is on the residents.

Second, the construction of the personalities of the residents is deeply influenced by definitions and interpretations made by the staff. The residents' presentation of themselves is in fact a mirror image of the staff's representation of residents.

Third, the staff members often speak about themselves as unlucky people upon whom this hard work fell, and from whom personal sacrifice is expected.

Fourth, the relationships between the different actor groups in the institution (residents, mid-level staff and managers) are based on mutual expectations towards each others, accusations against each other, and discontentment with each other. The relationships between the residents and the staff differ from the relationships between the different levels of staff in the regard that there is a clear lack of direct, comprehensive and professional discussion between the management and the mid-level staff. The interactive process is not that between equal partners and does not include verbal information of expectations, but is based on the assumption that the other party knows and understands what is the correct way to behave.

Fifth, with regard to the relationships between the staff and the residents, it should be underlined that the residents expect self-sacrificing work from the staff, whereas the staff sees the residents not as a subject, but an object of their work.

Sixth, it is characteristic to the relationships between the residents and the staff that the residents are willing to and actively seek opportunities to talk to the staff, but the staff is more reluctant to do so. The residents seek communication and conversations with the staff as the most desirable form of interaction, whereas the staff sees it as an extra work load outside their duties. From the staff's point of view, communication with the residents should be of an 'educative' quality with an aim to provide help, solve a problem or engage in some activity; to achieve a desired goal. During my fieldwork period, this appeared to be the most essential issue that needs to be developed in the residential management of the institution. In my experience, there was nothing that produced as good results as informal contacts between the staff members and the residents without any specific goal in mind.



## 5. ACTION:

### Reconstruction of the Everyday Activities at the K. School

Everyday routines, which people hardly notice, has the most relevant role in the formation of human personality. In this chapter I introduce the everyday routines of the K. school through which the residential management of troublesome girls is constructed. The data used in this chapter were produced on the basis of my observations and on the basis of the interpretations made by both the residents and the staff about incidents and events. In the description of how the residents first arrived in the institution, for instance, I include both the residents' own memories and feelings about their first day or days in K. and the staff's narratives of the same events. I collected the information by frequently asking such questions as 'how does it usually take place?' and 'could you describe a typical situation' in regard to various activities.

Despite my selection and interpretation of the daily activities I hope that the description provides the reader the opportunity to create his/her own images about the operation of the institution.

In reading the descriptions of events and activities the reader can perhaps obtain a picture of the actors' behaviour and activity and compare it with their verbal representations. The juxtaposition perhaps helps in understanding the meaning of the verbalised concepts.

This chapter is divided into subchapters, which introduce the daily activities at the institution from the regular and typical to the more unusual events. There are formal and institutionally planned activities, informal and unplanned but nevertheless regular activities, and occasional developments and incidents.

### 5.1. A New Girl Is Coming: The Ways of Entering the Institution

As I already described in chapter 3.2. with concern to the metaphor of 'madhouse', both the image and reputation of the K. School and the emotional condition of the young people who are sent there can be compared to a sentence of imprisonment. The following pages consist of excerpts from my field notes in which the residents reminisce about their coming into the institution.

*When we were walking along the dormitory corridor, L. narrated the events which resulted in her finding herself in K.: "One day Y. (a youth police inspector) came to my home and asked me to come with her. — 'Where?' — I asked. She just said that she wants to show me something. I went along with her. We got into her car and started driving. I had no idea where we could be going, but when the car left the town I suddenly figured that we are going to K. I started crying and screaming 'I don't want to go there!', but she just told me 'it would be better for you to be there'. I wanted to jump out of the car but couldn't. ... I had been really scared already for a long time that this would happen and thought that if they ever sent me there I'll kill myself. ... But you see I couldn't because they didn't warn me beforehand....." (II.4.L.a)*

*We were sitting in the educators' room with J. It was a Sunday and the first time she spoke to me about herself. I had been wondering what such a bright girl as J. is doing here. She explained that she had been a heroin user for about a year before she was sent to K.*

*"I was sent to be interviewed by the commission several times, but I could always convince them that I'll go back to school and stay at home. But the last time I was there and they were expecting to hear the same stuff again, I felt that I couldn't give up my friends or drugs. I asked them myself to be sent to K." J. was very aware and decisive, and arrived to the school on her own on a bus. However, later she escaped several times from K. and visited her friends, but came back again by herself. (II.6.J.a)*

Most of the residents were taken to the school either by an authority, such as a child protection inspector, youth police officer or even one of the K. School staff members by preliminary arrangement, or by parents.

At first, a new resident was placed under quarantine, which meant isolation in the school 'clinic' on the ground floor. The nurse and the physician examined the newcomer and took the necessary tests to clarify her health condition. The time spent in quarantine served the purpose of gradually preparing the new resident to become part of the institution. At any given time, there were also one or more other girls staying in the clinic for various reasons, such as being sick, depressed, temporarily protected from bullying by other girls, and hence the new girl was not entirely alone. The 'older' inmates told the new girl about the life inside. This was also the time that the managers and the psychologist became acquainted with the new girls and prepared her for what is coming. This period of soft landing was officially termed a 'gradual entering' into the school. The managers together with the psychologist and an educator decided which bedroom the newcomer would be placed. As a rule, bedrooms were shared by classmates.

The quarantine lasted from a few days to one week. It was up to the girl herself to decide whether she was ready to join the other girls, and she was not forced to take her place in the dormitory until she herself wanted to.

Moreover, the other residents prepared themselves for the reception of the new girl. It was obvious that well before the newcomer joined the others, they had already gathered a lot of information about her. There was always somebody at the institution who knew the new girl from before. These children belonged to the same world. They often came from the same areas, went to the same schools, were members of the same subcultures, and might have met each other when sent to appear in front of the youth commission. It was also a relief to the newcomer if there already was someone there whom she knew and could possibly offer support. However, there were cases when the earlier acquaintances were for worse for the new girl. The relationships that were established 'in freedom' ('vabaduses', 'на воле') (a typical expression of the residents in protest to the institutional space) were changed when re-established at the institution. If the girls had hung out in the same group before being sent to the K. School and their status in that group were as strong, then the girl who had already arrived had an advantage. She could choose to support her friend, but the friend



would have to 'pay' for this in one way or another. Usually she had to be at the disposal of the 'older' girl for various kinds of services. If she did not understand this, she was punished. Circumstances such as those prevailing in the K. School gave the girls the possibility to assess the depth of their friendships. For instance, one girl learned in an unpleasant way that another girl she had been able to count as a friend outside the institution coldly left her on her own to face the rest of the school. However, a lot depends on personal qualities of newcomer and her 'assets'. The same qualities that are valued in delinquent subcultures in general were also highly valued in the institution: courage, wisdom and street-smarts, the ability to keep secrets, physical power, craftiness in mischief and a high spirit of protest against the system. (Cloward & Ohlin 1960, Cohen 1955, Matza 1989, Saar 1990, Willis 1977). In the circumstances of a closed institution, when the satisfaction of different needs (for example, smoking) are inhibited, material possessions such as clothes, cigarettes, and cosmetics; as well as good relationships with supportive friends both inside and outside and relatives were highly valued among the residents. A new girl with a lot of such luggage was more easily welcomed by others.

There was a multiplicity of issues with regard to placing a new resident in the dormitory that had to be carefully taken into account. Once, for instance, the managers decided to send a new resident to the dormitory during a holiday time when many of the girls were at home. An educator made the point why it was not wise to do so:

*"It is not a good idea to send any new girls to live in empty rooms. Let them wait until the others come back. There is always the chance that someone steals something and blames it on the new girls." (I.5.E.c)*

The arrival of a new resident on the dormitory floor was a big event for the girls. Everybody crowded into her bedroom to get to know her. These get-togethers could last for quite a while. First, the 'leaders' came to instruct the newcomer about the rules and the desired behaviour. The extent of the interest of the leaders in the new girl also depended on the girl herself. Some new residents made a good impression on the others already before coming to the dormitory.

After the first welcome, a very difficult testing period began for the new resident. In order to secure her own place in the residents' hierarchy, she had to show who she really was.

There are some typical qualities that were rated high among the residents. One had to have stamina to suffer physical pain, she should not be greedy and under no circumstances was she to inform the staff about what happened among the residents.

One resident told me the story of the torture she had to go through in the beginning:

*(R. = a resident; I. = interviewer)*

*I.: What usually happens here when a new girl comes?*

*R.: They make them submit. The most important thing here is not to be scared of them and not to complain. When I first came I stayed with S. in the same bedroom. She put me through a test. I mean, obviously for the first three months I had to clean the room every day. Besides that, one night she started to strangle me. And I pretended that I choked, and after that relaxed and didn't breath at all. She stopped strangling and started to poke my face. But I didn't react. She was sure she had killed me. She... to K.: 'Listen, I think I killed her.' K. splashed water on my face. Then I went: 'Hey? What? What's happening?' 'What's wrong with you?' 'Nothing, I am sleeping'. ... Next morning K. asked me: 'Where did you get those bruises and scratches on your neck?' 'I don't know, maybe I hit myself by accident' 'I know it was S. who tried to strangle you last night,' — she said to me. 'I know nothing about that...' (II.4.L.b)*

The description of this kind of scene could be an extract from an instruction manual on correct and heroic behaviour for the new resident. With all the exaggeration, this shows how the girl wanted to convince the others she was capable of ideal behaviour. If she continued to behave in this kind of way, she had a good chance of soon becoming the new leader of the group.

Another conversation with 'older' residents demonstrates the concern they felt for a new resident:

(S., D. = residents; I. = me)

"I.: I spoke today with Y., she has a hard time getting used to the school and she is terribly homesick. How do you think we could help her?

S.: Yes, it is very difficult to get used...

I.: What helped you to get settled in?

D.: The problem is that there are too many new girls here now and they don't behave themselves. We have our own rules here and they should be carried out. We all went through this. But now all these new girls are coming and they absolutely don't want to submit.

I.: Does it mean that submitting to the rules and not protesting helps them to go through it?

D.: Well, yeah! You know, after all there are older people here and they should be respected.

I.: Interesting, I thought you are all the same age here.

D.: Older doesn't mean that but just people who came earlier.

I.: I see, it's like the army here?...

D.: Exactly!" (III.2.a.)

I told about this conversation to one mid-level staff member. She answered that this kind of an attitude was not a rule, and that in fact the girls were quite willing to support each other. However, this was one opinion only. Other mid-level staff members advised me not to intervene too much in the relationships between the residents. They explained that there were certain rules and hierarchies among the girls which the staff did not deal with, and that it was for the good of the whole community that the girls were left to figure out their relationships on their own. "*Of course you must control them, but as long as we have no big problems with them terrorising each other its better to leave them alone.*" (I.5.E.d) Both of the two responses of the staff members made one thing clear: the resident had their own relationships and the staff interfered in them as little as possible, if at all. Staff involvement would only cause more problems.

Unfortunately, I did a stupid thing: I openly began to protect a resident who was seriously bullied by others. My involvement did nothing to help to the victim and backfired on me. The measures that the experienced staff took in a similar situation were quite different: the intervention was directed only to the victim who was



isolated from the other residents for a while. I found this kind of solution unjust, because it made the victim seem guilty and took no action towards those who generated the trouble in the first place. Later I understood that it was impossible to protect a girl inside the institution in any other way, because despite so-called 24-hour supervision, there were more than enough opportunities to pay back the 'protected' resident. (About this see more in detail in chapter 5.7.2.).

Occasionally, a new girl received support from others if she had a good friend in a high position among the residents already inside the institution. This was not the case with Y. When she first came, a girl in the school who had been friend with her before turned to be the first one to terrorise the newcomer. Why did this happen? It was impossible for me to find out. However, I soon learned that the fact that the 'inmates' rules were infinitely complicated and different from what I had encountered before, and that everybody had to find their own place the hard way. The girl and her assets were carefully investigated.

Some residents adapted very quickly. There was a new girl in my own group who went through the adaptation phase very quickly. She was cheerful and sociable, and even though she gave presents to and related mostly with the leaders, she was also affable to everyone. Her family and many friends outside the institution visited her often. All these were positive points in the eyes of the residents. However, she did not stay at the institution for long; she managed to organise her escape with a few other girls and they did not return at least during my stay.

In conclusion of this sub-chapter it should be emphasised that when an adolescent girl is directed to a closed institution, the event is difficult and shocking for everyone involved. Any radical change from one living environment to another is hard.

The purpose of sending a youngster to a special needs school defines what kinds of factors the decision-makers take into account. If this is assessed as an opportunity for development for those children who have not had favourable circumstances for developing in their natural living environment, then the arrival to the institution should be prepared in advance. The child has a right to know what is going to happen to him/her. Such a violent and unprepared transport to

the school as was described in the beginning of this chapter has a very negative impact also on the future relationship between the resident and the school. There must be ways to introduce the idea to the children and explain why it would be better for their own sake to continue going to school in an institution where they also receive good care. In my opinion, the word 'care' ought to be used more frequently in the vocabulary of both ordinary school teachers and decision-makers when the lives of these young people are concerned.

The first three months in the K. Special Needs School is the most difficult time for the residents, and from my own experience this is true also in regard to new staff members<sup>17</sup>. There are a lot of informal norms and norm-setting activities at the institution, which every newcomer learns during the adaptation process. The fact that there is an initial testing period for every newcomer leads to the conclusion that the residents have their own hidden subculture based on power relationships, which is characteristic to total institutions (Goffman 1961, Foucault 1961).

## 5.2. The Regulated Daily Activities

### 5.2.1. The Daily Regimen. Waking up

An ordinary day at the institution ran as follows:

7.30	waking up, cleaning rooms, preparing for school
8.00	breakfast
8.30–13.40	school
13.40	lunch
14.00–16.00	vocational training
16.10–17.30	private studies (doing homework)

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<sup>17</sup> Everyone who enters the institution goes through a hidden three-month testing period. I learned about this unwritten law from one of my colleagues, who also informed me that being a staff member does not make any difference: *"You are a new person here, and the girls' relationship with you is different than with the older staff. You have to go through this test just as everybody else, never mind if they are residents or staff members."*

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17.30–	free time (walking)
19.00	dinner
until 22.00	free time in the dormitory
21.00	supper
22.00	bedtime

All the daily enterprises were commenced with a bell. At 7.15 the first bell rang that notified the girls to get up. The residents are organised in pairs to work in the kitchen one day at a time, and those girls woke up earlier and went to their duties.

At 7.30 the educators (usually one or two people) came to their dormitory floor, relieved the night watchwoman from her duties and checked whether all the girls had got up and how were they performing their morning activities. The educators popped into each of the bedrooms and supervised the girls who had until 8 o'clock to finish dressing, washing and tidying up their bedrooms. The girls were usually hurrying up and down the corridors. Some of them were already dressed, some walked about barefoot and in their night gowns. They held toothbrushes with toothpaste in their hands. Only some of girls were dragging their feet because it was hard to wake up. There was one girl who could never wake up properly. She told me about her sleeping problems — she would not fall asleep before three or four in the morning and at 7.30 it was impossible for her to wake up. She usually slept through the first lessons of the day at the school. Being at the institution for a long time didn't change the situation.

### 5.2.2. Breakfast

At eight the bell sounded calling the girls to breakfast. The residents went down to the dining room carrying their school things with them. After breakfast they went straight to school. When they entered the dining room, they left their school things on the floor of the corridor near the dining room entrance. In the dining room, the residents had their own assigned places. Each table was shared by four people. The tables were already laid by the time the girls came in. The staff members on duty circulated around the tables and kept watch over the residents to see if they were eating properly. Most of



the girls ate very quickly and finished their breakfast in five minutes. Some girls took their time with the food and ended up being late nearly every morning.

The bell rang again at 8.20; it was then time to go to school. The residents tidied up their tables and piled their dirty dishes on a side board. Many residents took bread with them as they left the dining hall, some quite a lot. The girls often told me about being hungry all the time. For most of them the problem was that they were not used to eat in regular meal times. When the residents complained about the circumstances at the institution, they mentioned the fact that they had to eat when not hungry but according to the daily regime as the biggest violation of their lives:

*"At home I can eat when I want to but here it is impossible. Here you have to eat when they give you a meal. I don't like it. It is too difficult and I feel hungry all the time."* (II.9.I.b)

*An educator explained the residents' eating problems in the following way: "Their eating habits are terrible, especially in the beginning. They are always chewing on something. Some of them are so full they get sick and throw up but keep on eating more and more and more. It is from nervousness."* (I.5.E.b.)

I was observing a new girl who literally grew from thin to fat in two months — she always had bread or cabbage in her pockets to nibble on.

In principle, the residents had the possibility to eat as much as they wanted. They also received parcels from home which usually contained candy or other sweet things. The girls were supposed to share with others any such presents. Naturally, some tried to hide their goodies, but that was virtually impossible. Most of the residents low in the hierarchy had to give everything away to repay cigarettes they had already smoked. This was a discharge of debt (more see in chapter 5.7.).

If the residents had any money, the educators held on to it. In principle, the girls could ask the educator to buy her food and other things, but the final decision was made by the educator. If there was enough money, the girls usually asked to be bought candy or chewing gum. At times they also requested for plain white bread.

Especially the low-level staff kept emphasising how much food there is and how rich it is. The girls ate four times a day, and both lunch and dinner were hot meals. I did not see a problem in quantity or quality of the food, but rather in the way food was used as a disciplinary method. The residents mostly came from either very poor homes or from homes where there were no regular meal times, and had a hard time adjusting to eat in a regulated way. Hence, they often saw eating regulations as another form of violation of their freedom.

### 5.2.3. The Morning Roll Call

Every morning before the teaching began, all the residents, teachers and educators had to be present for roll call. Each form stood in line, and one resident from each form was on duty that day reported on the form's composition and possible absences, such as residents who were sick, on duty either in the kitchen or on their dormitory floor, as well as those who were off the school grounds on a home visit, in the hospital or escaped. The morning roll call was also an opportunity for the staff to inform both the residents and each other if there were any changes in the regular school schedule. The roll call took all and all only about ten minutes. At the K. School, only morning roll call was held, whereas in the equivalent institutions for boys a head count was taken several times a day. For instance in the T. School, which was the institution for the Russian boys, roll call took place before every activity by the headmaster himself.

### 5.2.4. Cleaning the Dormitory's Public Space

After the roll call, the bell rang again and the girls went to the classrooms. The four girls on duty in the dormitory, two from each floor, went back to their floors together with the respective educators and cleaned the corridors, toilets and the wash rooms. One girl cleaned the long corridor of her floor and the wash room, the other the short corridor and the toilets. The staff kept an eye on the work of the girls and also checked the condition of the bedrooms. There was a

list of requirements for how the bedroom should be kept, and the educators assessed the state of the rooms accordingly. Smoking was the most severe offence against regulations. If there was any sign of smoking in the room, the assessment automatically read 'very bad'. The checking of the rooms involved the educators looking in the wardrobe, desk drawers, and under the bed. *"It is a repugnant task, but there's no alternative. They are so slipshod that if we didn't check up on the condition of the bedrooms, they would never clean them,"* (I.8.H.c.) one staff member said to me once as we were checking the residents' bedrooms.

One of the girls living in each room was appointed the 'senior' of the room, and she was responsible for the ultimate condition of the room. I noticed that every morning it was mostly the same girls that cleaned the rooms. Later I came to know that cleaning is the duty of 'recruits' and girls low in status in the residents' hierarchy.

As a rule, one educator checked the bedrooms while the other supervised the girls who cleaned the public space. The biggest problems occurred with cleaning of the toilets and the wash room. The girls tended not to clean them to the standards of the staff, and educators supervised this work particularly carefully. At times a displeased educator made the girl clean the place all over again. Sometimes there were exceptionally difficult situations. I particularly recall one incident when M., a small 11-year-old girl was responsible for the toilets. At the time, there were 58 girls living on the floor, and that particular morning the toilets were messier than usual. M. had to make three separate trips out to take all the rubbish away. Two out of the four toilets were out of order, and one of the working ones was clogged and filthy. M. hoped that she could unplug it with water, but the water did nothing else than caused the contents of the toilet to flood all over the floor.

(M. = a resident; E. = educator on duty)

M.(cries): O-o-o, it's all coming out to the floor! (runs and jumps on top of a chair)

E.: What are you doing? You have to dig it out of the bowl!

M.(crying): It's not my fault it's too dirty here today! Why do I have to do this?



- E.: *Because you are on duty today and it is the work of the people on duty! Go take the stuff out, otherwise the whole place will flood ...*
- M.: *How can I take it out? With my hands?*
- E.: *How can I take it out! How do you think you can take it out? Of course with your hands!*
- M. (crying): *I can't do it!*
- E.: *If you don't do it, then you go there where your place is, you know yourself where? Get down from that chair! This way you can't do anything at all.*
- M.: *I can't, my slippers will get wet! I can't go to the water with slippers!*
- E.: *Go put boots on! Who told you to clean toilets in slippers? And go fetch the plunger.*
- M. (with boots): *I couldn't find the plunger! It's gone again. Yesterday it was there, but now it is gone. Everything gets stolen. I'll go and look for it on the second floor. Soon she comes back with a handyman who brings the plunger. The handyman opens the toilet and it works again.*
- E.: *Now tidy up the toilet paper from the floor and take it out!*
- M.: *I took the rubbish out three times already, I don't want to go again!*
- E.: *Don't rebel, the work isn't done as long as there is rubbish in here. In the evening all the girls come and the rubbish bin will overflow again. Don't argue with me, just do your work nicely if you don't want to go you know where!*
- M. (carrying the rubbish bin out): *It's not my fault that it's so dirty here, that there is so much rubbish... (when she is back she asks: Well, is it ready now?*
- E.: *Yes, now you can go to school. Tell me, was it so heavy? Look, now the toilet is nice and clean!*
- M. (smiling): *In fact it wasn't that hard.*
- E. (after M is left): *Oh, this just makes me sick."* (III.9)

The previous scene may be shocking to the reader, but in a certain sense it is symbolic. It demonstrates how it is in real life — both the residents and staff members have to deal with such a difficult and hateful activity — to clean the mess that other people have irresponsibly left behind them. It is also symbolic that the rubbish that was produced by so many people, but the cleaning is left to a few.

The girls on duty on the floors were not supposed not to spend a very long time cleaning. At 10 o'clock at the latest they had to be in their classrooms.

### 5.2.5. Schooling

Providing primary education to the residents is the most important official aim of the institution. According to the Estonian Law on Primary and Secondary Education (1993) and the Juvenile Sanctions Act (1998), K. types of schools are primary schools for young people with special needs in education to help them complete their compulsory schooling. Special needs schools for children and young people with behaviour problems work on the basis of the ordinary primary school programmes.

The K. Special Needs School covered six forms from the fourth to the ninth. The Estonian side had pupils in all forms, but the fourth and eighth were joined together due to the small number of pupils on those levels. On the Russian side there were fourth, seventh, eighth and ninth forms, and also the fourth and the eighth forms were taught together in the same classroom.

The teachers had to teach in very difficult circumstances for various reasons. If there were only a few pupils in one form, two forms were joined together. One teacher taught more than one subject. For instance, the Russian side had only two teachers of its own. One of them taught the Russian language and literature, history, geography and English. The other was responsible for the natural sciences; mathematics, physics and biology. The other subjects, Estonian language, singing, drawing and gymnastics were taught by teachers of the Estonian side of the school. There were new residents arriving at the institution in the middle of the school year, and for this and other reasons they were on very different academic levels. The teachers continuously complained about how impossible it was to teach the girls anything. They were all in need of individual attention and tutoring, but that was not possible to arrange in such circumstances. The results were poor. In the fifth form, for instance, there were only three pupils, but no one finished the course and all of them had to repeat the year. Some of the residents were not

graded for all of their classes, and some received no assessment at all. The teachers often spoke about the need for a special study programme for these pupils.

The most serious problems were concerned with the teaching process. The school was assumed to offer primary education according to the general Estonian school curriculum, because the residents were officially defined as children with behavioural problems but with normal intellectual capacity. This approach was a leftover from the past system when the case was really defined as: children with behavioural problems were sent from ordinary schools to a special needs school for slight reason. It was impossible not to complete the school year, whereas the current residents may have not been to school for months at a time, some virtually never. The girls had such huge gaps both in their academic knowledge and learning habits that they were impossible to mend. The teachers were at a loss in attempting to solve problems for which they had not been trained.

The official statistics of the educational results in the K. School were the following: In the school year 1996/7, out of 69 pupils who studied in the 4<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> forms, 11 (16%) pupils failed and had to repeat the year. 4 pupils (6%) had additional work for the summer. 4 (19%) of the 21 residents who attended the 9<sup>th</sup> form failed the course. This means that they received an attendance certificate but no mark. There were particularly negative results in the Russian sector, where 33% of 9<sup>th</sup> form pupils failed (2 girls out of 6) the course. The percentage would have been even higher if the one resident who was expelled just before the end of the school year was added to the total (see chapter 5.5.).

At the same time it was possible to perceive some signs of shift in the general goals of the institution. Both the management and the mid-level staff set the aim of control and protection, as well as (re)socialisation of the residents as the top priorities of the institution. A study conducted by Kõrgesaar (1999: 40) lists the following points as the results of the study in regard to the assessment of the aims of special needs schools: "The most important aims ... for both the residents and teachers/educators, as well as headmasters are (1) reformation of personality, (2) getting prepared for independent life, (3) controlling the residents' behaviour, including the protection of other people, (4) providing academic knowledge." The notion that



the school and the studies were necessary to keep the girls occupied, girls who did not know what to do with their free time, is embedded in the research results. The staff of the K. School in general realistically understood that a K. School education was inadequate to continue with further education or to compete in the labour market. Goldson's point (1997: 20–22), that school is in the first instance an institution that excludes children from active social participation with the implicit aim of state control, is true of the K. School young people.

According to my observations, learning was largely based on the mechanical memorisation of texts. The residents' favourite subjects were drawing and gymnastics. Particularly the drawing classes were a welcome activity. Teaching drawing at the K. School only involved learning the techniques of self-expression, and was as such among the rare occasions that the girls were able to express themselves in a non-verbal way and have positive experiences without needing to be afraid of any negative evaluation.

### **5.2.6. Vocational Training**

After school was over at 13.40, it was lunch time. From 14.00 to 16.00 both the Russian and Estonian residents were divided in three groups for vocational training in dressmaking, knitting or garden work.

Vocational training, particularly sewing and handicrafts, was much preferred over academic studies. The girls also gathered together during their leisure time for a sewing group, which gave them a great deal of pleasure. Doing handicrafts provided the girls with an opportunity to chat with their instructors in an informal way, and similar to drawing classes, was particularly important because of being free from any moralistic content. Unfortunately, at the time there was no organised work therapy — or any other form of therapy — at the institution which would have been extremely valuable for the girls' development. However, the drawing classes and the vocational training can be seen as rudimentary art and work therapy.

### 5.2.7. Doing Homework

16.10–17.30 was reserved for individual studying, namely doing homework. The residents went to their form teacher's classroom and did their homework supervised by an educator. For every form or 12–14 residents there is a form teacher and two or three educators.

*"The educator must keep order and make sure the girls don't disturb one another but concentrate only on their own work. The educator also has to help the girls if there is something they don't understand something in their assignments." (I.4.D.a.)*

The girls keep their school books and other school paraphernalia in their form teacher's classroom, and know what they are supposed to be doing. The work is mainly done independently. Naturally, the girls are often reluctant to work on their books. By this time they are already tired from the day's activities which started at 8 am with only a lunch break and some short recesses in between the classes and training. The girls often tried to get away with it by claiming that they had already finished everything during class. Mostly the girls were busy with their English, German, Russian or Estonian lessons: they translated texts or did exercises. Some school teachers used the time as an opportunity to give individual tutoring to the girls, which often meant making sure they had learned the day's lesson by asking question about its content. It was also a good time to discuss the form's problems with the educator on duty. The girls were usually pestering the educator to help them out with their translation or language exercises. Some girls walked from classroom to classroom to ask their friends out. They excused themselves by saying that they had to go to the toilet or to drink water. If possible, the girls also used the time for writing letters or doing handicrafts. Towards the end of the individual study period the resident on duty for the classroom began to tidy it up. The classroom was cleaned twice a day; first after the school hours and another time after homework. Cleaning meant taking out the rubbish and sweeping and washing the floor.

### 5.2.8. Walking and Free Time

The bell sounded the end of the homework period at 17.30. The girls had free time. They could either go to the dormitory, or if the educator gave permission, they could take a walk. All the girls were supposed to have a chance to go for a walk once a day, but this was harder to realise than to say. The educator who accompanied the girls was solely responsible for them outside the buildings, and there was always the fear of escape. Certain educators refused to go for walks with the girls at all, and some agreed only to take those she trusted the most.

When thinking back on my first walk with the girls it seems like an amusing story, but at the time I was quite worried. There were thirteen residents in my group. One of the vice-heads had told me that it is prohibited to take the girls out of the school grounds, and the walks should only be taken in the garden behind the main building and on the yard. When I mentioned this to the girls, they outsmarted me: *"That's not true! We always take a walk outside!"* I had no reason to seriously doubt this because the other educator in my form habitually took the girls outside the fence. When we got out of the gate, the girls ran out all in different directions like a flock of birds. Some lagged behind, some ran far ahead. Two of the girls flanking me kept me distracted by telling a very important story. When I anxiously asked them if they thought the others were attempting an escape, they assured me that there was no reason to worry, the others were only looking for cigarettes (about smoking, see Prohibited Fun in this chapter). However, the walk was successful and I returned with all the girls with me.

After that first experience, we began each walk by deciding together where we would go and what the ground rules were. This was easier said than done, because as soon as we got outside, the girls forgot their solemn promise to stay near me. Sometimes I had to interrupt the walk and return to the school. However, the girls did not defy the joint decisions. I was always willing to take long walks with the girls. It was pleasant and easy to communicate with the girls outside the school's oppressive atmosphere.



### 5.2.9. Evening Time at the Dormitory

Dinner was at 19.00. After the meal, there was free time in the dormitory until 22.00 when the girls were to go to bed. Sometimes the educators on duty had dinner as well, but it was never explained to me why this was not possible every day. The educators ate in a separate room away from the girls.

After dinner the residents usually watched TV, did handicrafts or wrote letters. The evenings were also the times when the girls got prepared for different kinds of extra activities the staff had planned for them. During the time I spent at the institution, the girls had a "Style Show" and "Miss May Pageant". Together with the educators the girls made costumes, planned the programme and made other arrangements for the event. Some educators taught the girls to dance, sing or make the costumes (*"The girls are not able to make the clothes themselves"*). The educators organised and participated in these kinds of activities on a voluntary basis. Hence, every evening some girls were busy with these kinds of preparations, while the rest sought the company of the educators simply to chat or discuss problems of which they always had plenty.

At 21.00 the residents had supper. Together with the one or two girls who were on duty at the dormitory floor that day, the educator brought the supper from the guards' room downstairs. Supper usually consisted of fruit, biscuits or buns. The girls on duty were responsible for the boxes of food, and distributed whatever was for supper to the other girls according to a list of those present in the educators' room. The task gave them a sense of power. They were able to pick and choose the better fruit or bigger buns for the girls they liked, or earn points by slipping more food to the leaders of the group. The supper often included something tasty and sweet, and was therefore also a valid currency for trade. The usual transaction was to trade the entire supper for a half or a quarter of one cigarette. This often caused quarrels between the girls. A girl may have bought a cigarette on the promise of a supper from two different girls, and the rule was that the seller could choose the night when she wanted the payment. If there was something especially good for supper, there was bound to be an argument of who got her payment

that night. One girl who owed her supper to two girls at the same time ended up badly beaten.

When the girls were given fruit (usually mandarin oranges) or candy, they treated the educators. It was considered proper behaviour to treat others when one received something good, and refusing to do so was very bad behaviour indeed. To possess personal things, even food, was a privilege of the leaders only. However, even they at times treated their 'servants' high in the hierarchy with pieces of candy or other goods in order to show their satisfaction with the service and to guarantee it also in the future.

Otherwise, the girls were in the habit of playing with the food and even throwing it around. It was always hard for me to see pieces of good food strewn around the floor.

After supper, the girls started getting ready for bed. Bedtime was announced by the bell at 22.00, when the night watch also came to work. Bedtime was quite restless; it took a lot of running back and forth in the toilets and the washroom before the girls calmed down in their bedrooms and finally went to sleep.

The above-described was the weekday regime. Weekends were less strict. The residents got to sleep late, and instead of school work they tidied up the dormitory and were engaged in extra activities. Weekends were also the time reserved for visits by relatives. A special permit from the management was required to receive friends from outside the family.

All and all, the daily regime was based on strict schedule of routine activities. However, in reality the content of the schedule could be totally different. It depended on various factors, of which the atmosphere created by the educators on duty was of an utmost importance. The best results and smooth operation of the day were achieved if the educator had a stabilising impact on the girls, she was methodical, consistent and calm. If the educator showed too much emotion or inconsistency in her own activities, the girls became agitated and were hard to calm down again. The other extreme, apparent indifference and passivity generated protest among the residents: they provoked the staff members until they were given attention in one way or another. In general, the residents were sensitive and quick to respond to the mental state of the staff members they were in contact with. If someone had a bad day, was tired and nervous,

attempts to suppress and hide the stress were usually futile. The girls picked up the mood and made the situation even more difficult by showing their irritation and restlessness.

It was clearly apparent that the mental well-being of the staff was vitally important for working effectively with the residents. Teachers and educators on duty should be well rested, confident in what they are doing and mentally prepared to undertake the day of hard and demanding work. Any pedagogue working in such an institution as the K. Special Needs School needs to be well aware of the processes she participates in her work, as well as the impact she has on the residents as an adult, a pedagogue and a role model. This demands high-level qualifications; skills, knowledge and solid professionalism.

### 5.3. Teaching Knowledge and Skills

The managers and mid-level staff emphasised the importance of study for the residents. Many teachers stressed how 'backward' the residents were, and how it was mostly tied to neglect and underdeveloped habits to learn new information. The fact that schools in general pay little attention to whether pupils attend it or not is a new phenomenon in Estonia that appeared after independence. According to the present Estonia legislation (Law on Primary and Secondary Education §17 (6,7) (RT I 1993), parents are responsible for the schooling of their children. It is the duty of the parents to see to it that the children attend school. At the same time, schools have an interest in having as many pupils as possible because their financing is calculated on the basis of the number of students, although they are nevertheless concerned with keeping up good averages. Certain schools do not care much for pupils who have behavioural and other problems. The success of a school depends on the academic level reached by students and is measured by the number of students accepted to institutions of higher education (Kadajane & Strömpl 1999). Consequently, there are a number of children who are either absent from school for long periods at the time or never attend at all. When such a child is sent to a special needs school and expected to catch up in her studies with the other residents, problems are



inevitable. Yet, as pointed out earlier, the institutions follow the regular primary education curriculum due to the fact that officially the residents are defined as having normal cognitive skills and hence do not require special needs education programmes. The K. school teachers were very frustrated with this, and complained about great difficulties in being successful with ordinary teaching methods. According to my observations and general knowledge about teaching methods, most K. School teachers relied on learning factual information directly from textbooks. When asked about this, they explained to me that that was the way they taught their subjects. When the residents were doing their homework, the learning followed the same general lines: the girls directly translated sentences from one foreign language, either English, German or Estonian, to their native Russian. When they turned to me to help them out, I offered to help them learn vocabulary, but they usually declined and argued that they do not need to learn new vocabulary, but simply to manage their translations and memorise them. However, it is good to keep in mind that this is what the girls themselves told me. The Russian teacher who taught languages explained that the pupils preferred mechanical translations over other kinds of homework. Nevertheless, she could not give me advice about how I could help the pupils learn more effectively.

The girls often also turned to me to check if they had made their language exercises correctly. If I found mistakes they were quick to correct them, but did not like to listen why something was right or wrong. They learned long texts from history, biology and geography by heart without a wider context or deeper knowledge of the content. All and all, these girls had intellectual potential which had no chance to develop. In short, the subjects they studied remained alien to them.

Since I was present only a few times in actual classes, I am not in the position to tell much about the process of teaching in the classroom.

If I spent little time in the classroom, I had plenty of opportunities to observe the teaching of everyday skills to the girls. Because the staff had no illusions about the intellectual development of the residents, they focused on developing the so-called feminine skills of the girls. The most important of these feminine skills was cleanli-

ness, and the most important activity was household tasks. When I asked the teachers what skills they thought the residents need the most after they leave the institution the usual answer was: "*Cleanliness. What they generally learn here — to take care of their personal hygiene and their laundry*" (I.10.J.c.). The answer was quite unexpected in the light of the poor sanitary conditions of the institution. However, everything is relative, and in some sense I agreed with the teachers. Moreover, the residents spent a lot of time with cleaning their rooms and cleanliness in general was a value that they learned to respect at least to some extent. This was evident in the pleasure they took in justifying aggressive behaviour towards those girls they saw as not washing themselves properly. The staff implicitly reinforced this kind of behaviour because it was in accordance with the school aims (about this, more detail later). Another valued skill was handicrafts. A good woman was supposed to know how to sew and mend clothes and do other kinds of handicrafts. Sewing also produced material gratification, which in general was very important to the girls. If they were good at sewing they could make presents for their sisters, mothers or grandmothers, as well as nice things for themselves.

Special attention was paid to communication skills. Many authors who study the personality of troubled children and young people point out that one significant reason for the problematic behaviour of children and young people is that they do not know how to relate to other people, they initiate conflicts for slight reasons and are not able to put themselves in other people's position; in short, they do not have communication skills. The pedagogues of the K. School also pointed out the importance of teaching communication skills and gave quite a detailed description of their methods and practises of teaching the girls in this regard.

A teacher clarified the aim of her work as the following:

*"I see the content of my work being that during the time a child is in my hands, she should learn the maximum of everything she will need for coping after leaving the institution and hence manage her own life independently. I provide her with knowledge and information about what she is going to need in her life ...*

*To make her understand the situation she incurred, to think, analyse and weight the possible ways out of that. ...*

*Perhaps the thing that I think I do the best is the reconciliation with the family and mending of the relationships. For some girls I have downright dictated letters and explained: if you write to your mother like that, what is the reaction you should expect? You cannot cheat your mother if you want her to respond to you in a nice way. You should write your letter so that it will enter her heart." (I.2.B.c)*

When I spoke about communication skills with the staff members, it was important to establish what exactly they meant by that. Some emphasised listening skills: *"I know how to make other people listen to me"*. One teacher stressed the importance of convincing the residents to have confidence in the staff:

*"It is important to me that the child believes in me ... I want to make a child believe me; I look into her eyes and even try to hypnotise her: I want to help you. And I deeply believe in what I am saying. As I said already I never lie to a child. So the child would believe that I am not her enemy, but an oasis, where she can get help..." (I.6.F.c)*

There are two issues in this connection I see as significant. One is the different meanings people give to communication skills, and the other is the teaching process itself.

When the professionals and staff members spoke about communication skills, they were referring to either to the residents' inability to see other people as equal communication partners, but rather people who had to be pressured to bend to their own needs; or on the contrary, to the lack of self-affirmation and inability to say 'no' or resist the influence by others. Hence, there was no communication between equal partners, but the question was of power relations between the dominant and the subordinate. However, the staff members described the teaching process in a contradictory way as taking place between equal communication partners.

Certain details in the staff members' descriptions of what they considered important teaching skills and how they saw the relationship between a pupil and the teacher illuminate this point. It be-



came evident that it was the teacher who had an active role as a giver ("*I provide her with knowledge and information*", "*I want to help you*"), whereas the pupil had a passive role of a receiver ("*she learns what I teach her*").

A particularly apt metaphor for the relationship is the sentence: "*the child is in my hands*". The metaphor of the child as material for moulding was expressed repeatedly by different teachers. Despite of the collapse of the Soviet system, the aim of the special needs schools did not changed in content from the Soviet concepts of reformation and re-education of the children's personalities; however, the terms were disguised in the new word influencing<sup>18</sup>. If I asked what the difference between re-education and influencing was, the answer was that the former did not accept the individuality of the subject of the action, whereas 'influencing' expressly does that. The staff's interpretation of the term 'influencing' had its nuances, which revealed the notion of force behind it ("*to make her understand*", "*I want to make the child believe me*", "*try to hypnotise her*"). It is evident in these extracts that the resident did not have many options besides subordination, which one of the managers directly expressed: "*Our girls have to understand that they have to change their mind and behaviour, they have to learn to discipline themselves. It cannot happen without some coercion."* (I.6.F.c)

A managerial staff member portrayed a good teacher who could serve as a model for others: "*Look at X, for example. She is a very good teacher who knows how to get through to the girls. She does not leave a child alone before she has achieved with her what she wanted to. ...*" (I.12.G.a.)

One important aspect in the notion of 'teaching' is how it was verbalised by the staff. Teaching means to 'tell' what is 'right', and

<sup>18</sup> The terms 'reformation' and 're-education' were rejected as a violation of human rights, and replaced with the new term 'influencing' (mōjutama). The term appears in the law in the Juvenile Sanctions Act (1998) and also in the new Criminal Law (came into force 06.06.2001) in place of the earlier 'reforming'. What this signifies is the notion that nobody needs to be reformed, but that they can be influenced. In the Law on Incarceration (par. 2., p 1) for instance, the aim is changed into 'directing the person to correct him/herself' from the earlier 'correction'.

other methods of behavioural remodelling were passed over. Hence, big words about the importance of accepting one another and active listening skills co-existed with the day-to-day ignoring behaviour and even indifference. An extract from my field notes is a typical illustration of this: "*The two of us (P. and me) were sitting in the educators' room discussing the schedule of duties. Suddenly Y. just walked into the room and began to tell P. about something that happened to her that morning.*" This was common behaviour among the residents, and when I later studied my field notes, I found plenty of similar examples. I have to say here that later in the fieldwork I myself noticed the same behaviour. This type of interruptive and inconsiderate behaviour was most blatant in the relationships between the two ethnic groups (see chapter 4.3.).

#### 5.4. Educating Females — the Gender Issue

Because the K. School is a special institution for adolescent girls, the gender issue is a big part of the daily life, and as such is also included in my research data.

The institution itself is based on gender separation. The fact that female children should be separated from male children was so self-evident to all staff members regardless of their status that it was never even discussed. In spite of the fact that staff members knew that equivalent mixed-gender institutions existed in other countries, they were unanimous in their belief that single-sex schools were much better: "*It would be impossible for us to control them all the time, and if there were also boys here, God knows what could happen*" (I.3.C.b.).

When talking about the residents, the staff members also mentioned that one of the reasons for sending girls to K. was their sexual activity. "*Some of our girls were engaged in prostitution.*" Being sexually active was interpreted by most of staff members — as well as the residents themselves — as the '*personal characteristics*' of the girls and considered to be a problem of their '*stormy puberty*'. There is reason to emphasise that not one of the residents ever admitted prostitution, though they did point out some other girls whom they

believed to have been involved in sex work. The staff also emphasised that problems arise when there are 'hyper-sexual' girls or girls with lesbian tendencies among the residents. Such girls were seen as stirring up other girls' sexuality. It became apparent in the prevailing staff discourse on gender and sexuality that all the girls '*had problems with their sexual behaviour*' regardless of the possible reasons behind them. The staff in general did not deny the potential sexual abuse of the children and its impact on their behaviour; however, there was a generally strong biological deterministic approach to the question of the residents' sexuality. In addition to the above-mentioned 'hyper-sexuality' and 'lesbian tendencies', the staff emphasised that the age of 'stormy puberty' was obviously a difficult time in girls' development when they needed close control and protection against their own 'nature'. All this concurs with those biological and psychological determinist theories connected with such names as Lombroso and Ferrero, Freud, Pollak, Cowie, Cowie and Slater, whose theories received a critical analysis by feminist criminologists such as Smart (1980: 27-60), Belknap (2001: 35-39), and Pollok-Byrne (1990: 10-18).

Stereotypical thinking with concern to specific 'feminine' qualities that corresponded with the above-mentioned determinism that prevailed among the K. School staff consequently constituted the so-called 'bringing up girls'.

What is the content and speciality of this gender-based education? The responses I received to this question from staff members of different levels were very similar. This was one of the issues where the staff was strongly of the same opinion. First of all, it was established that females have their own specific character, which differentiates them from males. The two most typical distinct qualities were:

- females are weak; they are exposed to abuse and easily manipulated;
- girls are wily and can not be trusted.

According to the staff, these two qualities justified the emphasis on the protection and control of girls. While they stayed at the special needs school, this protection and control was provided, but deep problems began after they had finished school and were released to



the world: *"As long as they are here, everything is OK in their lives. We keep them in check. It's after they leave K. that the problems start."* (I.4.D.a.)

The staff, however, was aware that official control as it was understood and arranged during the Soviet era is not effective. The girls were in need of control of a more unofficial and informal kind, control that covered also the notions of protection, support and caretaking. As long as they were at the school, this task of loving control was over them was designated to the staff who took the place of the mother. In reality, however, the notion of motherly care existed mainly only as a desired ideal. (On the metaphor of home and maternal relations see chapters 3.2. and 6.3.3.) In addition to maternal care, female peculiarity is expressed also through other notions in the relationships between the staff and the residents. Both staff and the residents habitually used expressions of their feelings that were tied to inexplicable instincts and intuition. When the staff spoke about their work with the girls, intuition had a substantial role: *"Suddenly I feel what will be just the right method of dealing with her."* (I.6.F.b.) Also the residents used such argumentation for their thoughts: *"I just feel she isn't honest,"* or *"I see it in her eyes — she is guilty."* (III.9.)

Perhaps the most significant factor in the construction of the female gender was the relationship with the other gender, and how it positioned females. According to the staff, finding a good husband was the most important thing for a resident to have a successful future:

*"We have experience about our girls: if someone finds a good husband, her future will be OK. And it is strange, but many of them actually do find good husbands."*

*"What is their future? ... one out of ten will get married and everything will turn out fine for those girls... It is very important that a girl finds a good husband, who will keep an eye on her."* (I.4.D.a.)

The traditional stereotype of the inherently female character shared by all the staff included the notion that girls/women are at all times in need of outside control. First there is the mother, then the hus-

band whose task it is to keep an eye on her. Certainly, this control should contain caretaking as well (compare with definition of gender in institutional care/control described by Kersten 1989, Pösö 1993, etc.). All of the residents' problems were caused by a lack of responsible adults to take proper care of them. It is interesting that this belief so strongly prevails after the times of the general Soviet ideology of gender equality, which in fact rejected the notion of any differences existing between the sexes. In the institution's current understanding of gender-specific qualities, particularly with concern to the residents who are children and females at the same time, dependency was given a strong emphasis. Such an opinion is well expressed by Gittins (1998: 63):

*"The idea that children could, and can, survive in the world without adult protection, without conventional (middle-class) families, defied (and defies) middle-class notion of masculinity as defined in terms of independent men who must support 'naturally dependent' women and children, and who alone are capable of instructing, guiding and controlling such weak/ needy /Other beings."*

The most important aim of the school was to teach the residents to be dependent on a protective person. First of all, they studied subordination to those who care about them. Indeed, girls' delinquency consists of too many manifestations of independence: (running away from home, making independent decisions about what to do, where to go, where to live, etc.)

At the institution, it was time for the girls to finally understand that they had to be protected. In order to find a male human being who in future will take care of her, the girls had to acquire the qualities demanded from an eligible, good woman. She had to learn to be gentle, take care of her looks and be prepared for the activities and tasks predetermined for her future as a mother and a wife. The 'female education' at the institution was directly tied to the desired development of feminine identity and preparation for marriage and family. Communication skills were considered especially important for being a successful female. Deficiency in such skills was the fundamental reason for the girls' deviancy. (About the role of human relationships in the development of female identity see for instance Gilligan 1982, Chodorow 1978, 1999).

It may sound ironic, but in view of the present circumstances in the Estonian society the staff of the K. School were quite realistic. Because there are no state integration mechanisms and the lack of any special support programme for adaptation to successful independent life career for graduate residents, they really have no other opportunity to cope with their life in any other way. I must stress, though, that this is a question of the state social policy and not an opinion of mine. The school acts on the assumption of present reality. (About the opportunities of integration see more in chapter 7.)

In the viewpoint of the staff of the K. School, female identity and feminine qualities followed quite traditional logic. Cleanliness has the supreme position. A girl who wants to marry and to become a good wife and mother should be well groomed and pay careful attention to general cleanliness in her environment. She also must possess certain skills essential for making a good mistress of her household, the most important being sewing, knitting and other handicrafts.

An ideal future for a K. School girl and thus a successful outcome of the education at the institution was once expressed by a staff-member when asked about what impact the school had on the residents:

*"What makes me happy about my work? ... When I can see that a pupil of mine has become successful. Just earlier today we met one of our former pupils. She was also at the exhibition with her family. She used to be such a fretful girl. After leaving the school she married a man strict enough to control her. She has four children now.....and how nice those children are, well-dressed.....and the girl herself, she is also very nice."* (I.1.A.c.)

Female education puts a special focus on the formation of a woman's body.

Girls should be beautiful. When one of the teachers found out that some of the residents were going to tattoo themselves, she told them: *"Just imagine, when you have finished the school and are about to get married and you are going to have a beautiful white wedding dress, and then there is a tattoo on your hands. How will that look?..."* (I.2.B.d.)



A girl have must how to move her body, how to decorate herself, what clothes are becoming to her and how to behave as a beautiful young lady. This implies that the girls have to get used to making an appearance and know how to exhibit themselves. The purpose was served by organising different fashion and other shows, dancing competitions, and the most important of all, the beauty pageant in May, at the end of the school year. The shows had a multitude of aims. In addition to learning how to show themselves in the best light, they also learned hairdressing (also a hair-do competition was organised), make-up techniques and dressmaking. The main idea was to encourage the residents to prepare all the necessary paraphernalia for the projects themselves, including dressmaking. However, this aim usually did not come to much because the staff ended up sewing the costumes instead of the reluctant girls. One significant point in regard to such events was both the fact that they were great entertainment for the residents, far from boring or requiring much hard work and hence much enjoyed, and their nature as cooperative projects where the girls had to plan, negotiate and act socially with each other. The staff tried to involve as many girls as possible to participate. The rest had the role of the audience.

#### 5.4.1. Femininity and the Question of Trust

In comparison to boys, the character of girl residents was seen in quite an unfavourable light. A teacher who had wide working experience with residents that were both boys and girls described the difference:

*"Boys are more honest. You can trust them more. If you do something good for them, they will not cheat you in return. We attended many excursions, played sports and so on (outside the institution). We always made an agreement before the outing that there wasn't going to be any problems. And if they gave you their word that nobody was going to escape, they kept it. But a girl can promise you God knows what looking you straight in the eye, but in reality you can never know what is in her mind. ..."* (I.20.V.a.)

The quotation directly states that males are more grateful (*"If you do something good for them..."*). It was repeatedly underlined by the staff members that girls are not thankful. They just used other people for their own benefit, but did not necessarily remember all those good things that they received from the school and the staff.

On my first day at the institution, a colleague gave me a piece of advice: *"You should be careful with the girls: they may seem to become close to you and you feel you can trust them, but before you know it they have betrayed your trust in a very mean way. You should always be on the alert."* (I.5.E.a.)

One staff member gave me a narration of two incidents which were supposed to demonstrate why we should not trust the residents. In fact, I believe that both of them told about something quite different:

I.

*"When I started the job here I didn't know how difficult our girls would be. I was naïve, I trusted them. I gave everyone their own dresser drawer and told: 'Here are your drawers, keep your things in there.' But when our superior when he got wind of it she railed at me: 'Do you know what they're putting in there?' I didn't. ..."* (I.5.E.a.)

II.

*"Once in the beginning... I was young and I dealt with the girls a lot... We sewed many different things, dresses, even coats — I taught the girls how to sew a coat. ...Then we also had norms, we had to do some work for Sangar (a sewing company). ... Once when I was working with the girls, I came home and realised that I had no firewood. ... So I asked some girls to come with me to the forest and collect firewood.. When we got back we lit a fire and made some tea, because it was quite cold already. We talked and laughed and didn't think about the time. But at the school they had already started to search for the girls at because they thought they had escaped. I was punished and learned not to think but to follow orders."* (I.15.O.b.)

Both of these stories tell more about the way how a young staff member was taught not to trust the residents. As a rule, the staff emphasised the rebellious spirit of the residents and how they did

not want to cooperate with the staff. The stories also reveal that in fact it was an interest of the management to see that the residents and the mid-level staff did not get too close and trusting of each other; to use the divide and rule principle. It is true that the stories tell of the former times. However, when I remarked about this to her, she replied that this lesson was based on the real knowledge of experienced personnel.

I was also repeatedly cautioned not believe what the girls tell me. The comment the headmistress made on my master's thesis, which was based on interviews of the residents, was the following: *"They could tell you whatever kinds of lies, and you would believe them!"* (I.4.D.b.)

The question of truth and deceit was an everyday topic. Both the residents and the staff emphasised how important truth is and how much the other side lies. Actually it was quite difficult to understand what 'the truth' really was, because I found on repeated occasions how truth (as I understand it) was not told by various staff members; however, it was the one those same staff members who emphasised that she never lied to the residents:

*"... Then it is extremely important to make a child believe me. That is why I never lie to the girls. If they believe me, they will agree to come with me and I can influence them."* (I.6.F.c)

In conversations with the residents, some staff members kept asking the question: *"Do you believe me?"* They always received a reply *"Yes"*. However, I observed repeatedly that important information, which in my opinion the girls should have been given, was hidden from them. For instance, it was not told to the girls that their parents had the right to take them away from the K. school<sup>19</sup>. This kind of 'not telling the truth' the staff members explained to be in the 'best interests' of the child. The most important issue seemed to be to make the residents believe the staff, because this was seen as the basis for the effective educational work. In this case, 'the truth' was

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<sup>19</sup> The regulation of parental consent was removed from the law that concerned with sending young people to special needs schools, but at the time of my field work it was still valid and the parents' application had a decisive role in the decisions.



what the residents (or the other side) believed. Also the residents characterised their relationships with the staff members by first classifying the level of trust: "*I don't believe X or Y.*" was the worst possible quality attributed to a staff member. If the resident was asked the reasons for not believing one or another staff member, she usually explained them with irrational feelings: "*I just feel she isn't honest*".

Here is another quite typical scene from the field notes that illustrates the obscure line between truth and lie:

*"I was about to start a conversation with a resident when an educator casually whispered to me: 'Do not believe this girl, She is a liar.' After we had talked for a while, the girl told me that all her troubles at the school were because of truth: 'I always have to suffer because of truth! I just cannot lie. I always tell the truth. I can't look in the eyes...I blush...I always tell the truth. I know what is evil and what is goodness. I was baptised when I was 6 years of age and I am religious'..." (II.1.b.)*

Not only the residents were blamed for lying, but the staff, too. I had once spoken with one of the teachers and told about the conversation to another colleague:

*"Me: I had a good conversation with XY.*

*C.: Yes, she is an interesting conversation partner, but be careful, she likes to distort things." (I.15.O.a.)*

The question of truth often arose with concern to owning up to having broken the rules. For instance, the residents had to write explanatory essays every time when they had done something wrong. It was painful work for them. I frequently had the opportunity to observe the procedure, as in the following example: :

*(E. — educator; R. — resident)*

*"The girl sits at the table and is chewing her pencil*

*R.: What am I supposed to write?*

*E.: Write the truth, what happened.*

*R.: I had a problem outside that I had to solve, but it is not connected with this house.*

*E.: Then write about that.*

- R.: *I don't want to write about it, because it isn't connected with this house.*
- E.: *Than write about what it is connected with!*
- R.: *Oh, I don't know what to write!?*
- E.: *Write the truth! You won't be allowed to go to the dormitory until you have written the truth.... After some time when the paper is ready the educator looks at me smiling: In the end they always write the truth."* (III.3.)

When we went on walks, the residents almost never kept the agreement to walk near me and not to run in different directions. Walking time was a good opportunity to satisfy their needs; they were always looking for cigarette butts to smoke. I worried a lot about that, and did not quite know what to do with this problem. I pondered which solution would be better: To reject taking walks with them altogether, or to keep on taking the walks regardless of the fact that inevitably some girls will be looking for ways to satisfy their craving for cigarettes. I only knew that any attempt to prohibit this would not achieve any results. There were two things I found out during the walks that in my opinion were very good for the girls. One was talking about something interesting. The girls liked very much either to tell or to listen to all kinds of interesting stories. The second issue was for me as an educator to be very honest about my own feelings.

Once the girls asked me to walk to the village rubbish dump with them. I was shocked, but only asked what the reason to go there was. They told me that it was a fun place to explore where they could possibly find something interesting. Once they had found old cassettes which they could use. I understood that this was not the entire truth. After walking silently for some time, I began to explain them about how confused I felt about the whole thing. I told them that I would feel very bad about rummaging about in a dump with young people like them because it was a filthy place. I reminded them how they themselves bullied other residents they saw as dirty, and that I could not understand why they now wanted to play in garbage themselves. I finished by saying that my own young daughters would never go near a dump and how I would not like to take my residents there either. After I had spoken we all fell silent again for some time. Suddenly A. who had originally suggested going to

the dump stopped and turned back: *"I don't want to go to the dump."* My problem was solved and I never heard about going to the dump again.

The most pleasant memory I have of the time I spent as an educator at the K. School was a shopping trip into town with two residents of my group. Trips to town were allowed if the girls needed to buy something and one of their educators was willing to take them. Naturally they were also expected to be on their best behaviour. These two girls were not among the easiest of my pupils. I had already had one painful conflict with one of them. She was the one who put me through a very difficult test during the first couple of months of my stay at the institution and behaved in the most hostile way of all. The other girl was sent to K. because of a drug problem. She was 14 when she started using drugs, and at the time when she came to the K. School she was injecting opium. She was a clever girl, but sometimes she became very angry and impatient. She had previously run away from the school several times. However, she told me she had plans for her future, to live a normal life and never to return to her previous lifestyle.

When we took off for the trip, I was prepared for anything that might happen just in case. After the girls had done with their shopping, we had some time left and I took them to a cafe and suggested that they choose two cakes each, whatever they liked. Both girls chose the cheapest cakes. I was very touched with this gesture. After eating, they asked to go to toilet. I thought to myself: OK, they made a gesture, but now they will go to toilet and run away. I was wondering what would happen but nevertheless let them go to the toilet on their own. They were gone for about 10–15 minutes, but did eventually come back and we returned to K. in time.

In my opinion, the residents could be trusted and they were honest and thankful when they themselves found honesty and acceptance. I do not think it is necessary to win them over, but it is more important to take them seriously and communicate with them openly.



### 5.4.2. Charm and Decency

Mary Pipher (1994: 35–6) points out the contradictory cultural pressures towards the adolescent girls. The contradictions of culture include demands that exclude each other: such to *"be beautiful, but beauty is only skin deep. Be sexy, but not sexual. Be honest, but don't hurt anyone's feelings. Be independent, but be nice. Be smart, but not so smart that you threaten boys."* These contradictions cause girls problems. Pipher (1994: 43) shows four general ways of girls' reaction to the cultural pressures:

*"They can conform, withdraw, be depressed or get angry. Whether girls feel depression or anger is a matter of attribution — those who blame themselves feel depressed, while those who blame others feel angry. Of course, most girls react with some combination of the general ways."*

The following demonstrates how the development of decent behaviour of the K. School residents happens. There are quite intensive contacts between the K. School and a corresponding special needs school for male Russian young people, the T. School. (Perhaps one of the reasons behind these contacts is to prevent lesbian/homosexual relationships from developing among the residents in both institutions.) A disco is organised once a month in turn by the K. and T. Schools. Well-behaved residents, about 10–15 girls or boys, go with the school bus to the other school accompanied by two or three staff members. In my field notes there is an excerpt of a discussion in a staff meeting concerning the next disco and a conversation with a member of the management about a letter:

1.

(M. — a managerial staff member; Z., K., H., L., P. — educators)  
M.: *We are looking forward to the disco in T. What do you think about them?*

Voices: *Yes, it's fine.*

Z.(in R.): *Oh, last time I watched these two little... They danced so nicely — embraced ... I had tears in my eyes...*

K.(E.): *I liked it especially because I was on duty the next Sunday and they slept so well, and there wasn't any problem whatso-*

*ever with the night peace. ... But there is something I want to ask. Maybe I'm envious, but is it good that they kiss so much?*

*P.: Kisses and embraces are tenderness and that is naturally good.*

*K.: But where is the guarantee that they don't go too far? When they are there in a dark corner, anything can happen in a very short time.*

*P.: That is our duty to explain to the girls how far they can go, what they can allow. What decent behaviour is.*

*H.: We should tell them that it isn't nice to go to the dark corners.*

*L.: By the way, order in T. discos is guaranteed to be much better than here. I even prefer to go there with the girls.*

*M.: OK, then we'll go to T. on the 22<sup>nd</sup> (February)."* (III.1.b.)

2.

*"In the educators' room one of the managers hands me a letter and says: "Look, this is a letter that one of your girls is sending to a boy. This is her first letter! Speak with her, it is indecent to write like this." I take the letter, and see that there are two 'kisses' made with lipstick on the envelope. I have not seen this letter before and I do not know who has censored it. Now I read the letter and don't find anything indecent in it. I give the letter to another educator in our group, and also in her opinion it is a letter written in a usual way. 'Do take it with you to the town and send it from there,' — she suggests." (III.10.)*

Summing up the gender issue in the operation of the K. School, the following points are important.

- It was possible to perceive traditional stereotypes with concern to the gender issue. The problems of the residents were partly associated with the peculiarity of the female gender, which had biological causes.
- Traditional stereotypes were also present in the characterisation of the residents as being weak and dependent, wily and self-interested.
- In reaction to the former Soviet notion of gender equality, a tendency has developed at the K. School towards a greater differentiation between the genders that is expressed by an emphasis on feminine qualities.

- The specific feminine quality was expressed in activities that were considered 'typically female': cleaning, sewing, handicrafts and guiding the young women towards make up, hairdressing, fashion shows, beauty pageants, and so on. The residents were allowed to wear jewellery and other ornaments.
- The gender issue also included a reaction against the 'official' approach to managing the residents. It was replaced with a 'personal' (as feminine) approach. This tendency became apparent, for instance, in the vocabulary the staff used: they called the residents 'children', emphasised their need for family relationships as in 'mother and child', and talked about the relationships between the residents and staff with terms associated with emotions as in 'working with their whole hearts', 'compassion', desire to help, care, etc.
- A new type of a power relationship surfaced along with this kind of construction of informal relationships. It was characteristically irrational, based on emotions, could not and even should not be explicable, but something that is good and right. This 'maternal power' was in the best interest of the residents because it was based on positive feelings towards them. Nobody knew better what a child needed than a good mother who loved and cared about the child. One possible reason for turning to such an irrational, but natural and simple method of dealing with the girls could be found in the fact that the current residents of the K. School were younger and had more severe problems than before, and the old rational ways of managing with them proved to be ineffectual.
- The girls are under much heavier pressure to measure up to the general standards than boys, and if they fail to meet the society's expectations the society reacts more radically to them (Carlen 1987, Carlen & Worrall 1987, Hudson 1989, Kersten 1989, Pösö 1993, Smart 1980, etc.).

## 5.5. Discipline, Order and Exceptions

The mid-level staff reported about the lack of order at the institution. When comparisons were made between the 'new' and the 'old'



school (at the times before and after the reorganisation of the institution), all members of the mid-level staff missed the 'order' that used to be. The managerial staff also recognised the need for methodical and systematic order in the management of the residents. The mid-level staff expected the management to outline the general rules for re-establishing order at the institution, and pointed out the following:

" — There should be common house rules which both the residents and the staff should be well aware of. If anybody breaks these rules, she should be punished.

— It should be commonly understood that everyone is responsible for the equipment of the school. If somebody breaks something, she should pay for the repair.

— A general meeting with all the residents and the whole staff present should be organised to decide upon common rules. However, this is impossible because even us, the staff, are incapable of keeping the decisions we make among ourselves. Every autumn we plan and make decisions about improvements, but soon all is forgotten and all the promises lapse. In reality, nobody follows the rules and decisions we have made together.

— A proper exchange of information between the staff does not exist. We do not even have a notice board for information. ... And you have been present in our staff meetings? Do we discuss educational problems or individual cases? No, we only talk about what events were organised and what activities there are going to be in the future. We do not make any deep analysis of anything. ...

— We have no common policy in intervention. Every staff member does what she thinks is the best. As a consequence, the work has no real effect, because if I tell the girls one thing, another staff member tells them something else. And the girls know this well and use the situation. ...

— In a word, terrible. Why can some girls go out of the institute freely by themselves, while others can't? We allow somebody to go to the town and the girl comes back drunk, vomits in the bus... And what happens? Nothing<sup>20</sup>, the next candidates to go to town are already lining up." (I.2.B.e.)

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<sup>20</sup> As a rule, the residents can visit the town accompanied with a staff member. However, the management made an exception with two girls and

I have underlined the notions that I find particularly significant: First of all, the lack of common rules for all the actors in the institution. From the very beginning, my biggest problem at the school was not being able to get any written information or instructions about the house rules or about the tasks and duties of an educator. I only received oral instructions about the daily schedule. The duties of an educator were defined in quite an abstract way: to supervise the residents, to make sure they do not disturb each other and to see that "*they do what they have to do*", as well as "*to be there for them, to help them*". Other new educators spoke about the same problem. It took time to understand my duties which raised feelings of ambivalence. Only in April (after two months of work) did I receive the house rules. One of the young staff members told me that she had not seen them before either. The headmistress explained that due to the fact that the institution was in a process of transition, all the documents concerning the statute and the house rules were temporary.

The second problem concerned the areas of responsibility and hence directly linked with the above-mentioned confusion about the house rules. Since the rules were not defined in detail, it was impossible to hold anybody responsible for breaking them. The residents also received only oral instructions about their duties and what they were not allowed to do. However, because the reaction to any given deed of the residents depended on the actual staff member who dealt with the case, and because the residents always the possibility to turn to the managers if they felt unjustly punished, the rules and responsibilities were not taken very seriously. "*What can you do to me?*" — was the residents' attitude. They were right. If somebody broke the furniture it was not possible to demand any payment from

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let them go to town on their own. This was quite an unexpected decision and its motives incomprehensible, because both girls were very troublesome. Both of them drank alcohol during the trip to town. One of them managed to behave herself, but the other was very drunk and got sick. Even though she was punished by being kept in isolation for three days, it was still absolutely incomprehensible why they were allowed to go in the first place. This was not the only case of an exception to the rules that did not make any sense.

her because the residents either had little money or none at all. Breaking the rules was also assessed according to the severity of the violation. The biggest sin was escaping from the institution, as well as other mischief connected to it. The management treated breaking the rules inside the institution in a more tolerant manner.

There was a strong sense of a lack of communication among all the actors of the institution. The residents organised meetings among themselves when they felt compelled to discuss their problems because nobody listened. The same problem was sorely felt among the staff members. No information was exchanged, there were no common decisions. However, when some decision were made during the staff meetings nobody cared about implementing them.

This was my first experience of this: On the second day of my field work period, a staff meeting was organised. It was February and we discussed the walking time. According to the schedule, the girls were doing their homework between 16.10 and 17.30, and after that, there was a half an hour reserved for walking. The idea was brought up at the meeting that because of the winter time, it was already dark outside after the private study period. Consequently, a decision was made that instead of after, we would re-schedule the walking time for before the homework time, which was scheduled to start at 16.30 and to finish at 18.00. The next day I went to walk with my group at 16.00 with the aim to be back by 16.30 when the homework was supposed to begin. However, at 17.30 the bell declared the end of the private study period. It became evident that I was the only staff member who actually took the decision made about the walking time seriously. Afterwards, there was no mention of the changes in the schedule. When I inquired about this, I was told that I can decide myself what I saw best for my group: if I wanted to walk with them early, that was all right. Nevertheless, it turned out not to be as simple as that because the residents from other groups also began to ask their educators to walk with them when it was still light outside, but many of those did not like walking at all and were upset with me for giving my group such a privilege as to go for walks *during* the homework period. I had to explain the situation to the girls in my group, and we began to walk again in darkness after the private study time. Even though the residents ac-



cepted my explanation as something quite understandable, I felt quite stupid in such a situation.

I, as an educator, also missed common discussions of actual problems and cases of residents. Discussions were possible only with the managerial staff or with the other educator of the same group (my pair). However, there were many problems that concerned also other groups of residents and staff members. There were general institutional problems that should have been discussed and made decisions about jointly. The management seemed to expect teamwork — the headmistress even told me that she is "*dreaming of team work*". However, this was a 'silent' expectation, meaning nobody initiated cooperation, or the initiative was started from a negative point of departure. For instance, when a group of mid-level educators prepared to visit a similar institution in Finland one of the managers asked me:

*"Do you think that do our educators need to learn from our Finnish colleagues to change the education here to be more child-centred instead of educator-centred as it is now?" (I.6.F.c.)*

Of course I had not answer to this question, but proposed to discuss the visit in detail with the group of staff members who were going to Finland. I was not encouraged any further to do so, and unfortunately, I never knew if this meeting took place. When I talked about the visit with individual educators they saw the visit as a break from their work. However, the mid-level staff also emphasised what good work the management did at the Finnish institution which was manifested in good living conditions for the residents and cooperation between the entire staff on different levels. The mid-level staff connected all this with skilful management in the Finnish institution, whereas management was disappointed because our education work did not change to be any more child-centred after the visit.

As I myself often felt that many things about my work were just guess-work, it also seemed to me that the whole relationship between the mid-level and managerial staff was based on the same arbitrary thinking: the other side should make a correct choice on the basis of guessing what they have to do and how, and it was because the other side could not guess right, both sides ended up disappointed and blaming each other. The mid-level staff refused to take

responsibility and left the decision-making for management (especially the Russian staff), while the management shifted the whole responsibility to them. However, sometimes it seemed to be very difficult to be held responsible for everything, and decisions made based on one person's judgement are not always the best ones.

The story of twin sisters who were sent out from the K. School is a typical illustration of the point. The girls were sent to the institution from a children's home. One of them studied in ninth and the other in eighth form. The sister in the eighth form had very poor study skills and there was a good possibility that she would fail the class. Then the management made a decision that she could start work as a house painter. This decision gave the girl the opportunity to leave the school grounds unaccompanied. In a few days she became a very popular person among the residents. Her sister who had also done some vocational training before, and was also a house painter by profession, began to demand the right to work as well. This was not granted. Regardless of all the talk and explanations about the importance for her to finish her school, she refused to submit and stopped studying altogether. In the middle of May both sisters escaped from the school together with four other residents. After a few days they came back to the school with two other residents (i.e. four from the six escapees, including the twin sisters, returned). The other two were accepted back to the school, but the twin sisters were expelled the next morning. Thus the prodigal runaways were accepted back to the school, but the sisters were excluded the next morning on the grounds that they were already seventeen years of age, and one of them was not expected to finish her school year. *"We've given them the opportunity to stay here until the end of the school year. We made an exception for them. We tried to do the best, but they were very ungrateful. That's why they should go,"* (I.6.F.g.) — was the explanation of the management.

There were also other exceptional decisions that the management explained as an individual approach to the residents. In a meeting with the residents that concerned a mutiny the Russian girls had organised, one of the managers said the following:

*"Girls, you are all different from each other and we cannot and don't want to manage you as a grey mass. You are all different and*

*valued as individuals. Do not expect that we take the same approach to all of you. ..."* (III.11.)

Sometimes these exceptions were impulsive by character. One member of the managerial staff told me in an interview that she liked to find unexpected solutions. However, sometimes those unexpected acts were not carefully deliberated. Sometimes, but only occasionally, the outcome was successful by chance. Certainly it was true that there was little time to think about every situation and carefully prepare every decision. There were many such situations that required a quick reaction and a rapid decision on the spot. However, the management made those decisions by themselves without including the mid-level staff in a comprehensive discussion of the problem or the resident concerned before the decision-making. It was also true that it was quite difficult to discuss something together because of the resistance of the mid-level staff. However, this resistance had its' reasons. One of reasons seemed to be that nobody spoke openly about the problems at work.

At times the house rules were broken because of misunderstandings or lack of information. The following description of the rule about watching TV late at night is a good example:

*"The rule is that at 10 p.m. the girls have to be in their beds and there is silence in the dormitory. There are two television sets in the dormitory that the girls can watch before their bedtime. Once, late at night, there was a good film on. The girls asked that an exception is made so that they could watch the film. One of the managers allowed this as an exception on conditions that the residents promised that they would go straight to sleep after the film and everything was in order. The incident took place one Wednesday evening. The next week on Wednesday evening I observed the following scene:*

*— The girls came to the educator on duty and asked her to let them watch an especially good film that night. The educator did not allow watching TV in the middle of the night.*

*E.: You can't watch TV tonight! You have to be already asleep by that time!*

*G.: But the kind of film that is on tonight comes only once a year on TV!*



E.: *Last Wednesday you watched a film. Last week we agreed with you that it would be only one time.*

G.: *But we aren't some snoot noses who couldn't watch a great film.*

E.: *I am going to stick to our agreement! We told you then that we allow this only once.*

G.: *But this is the film of the century!*

E.: *Every week there are great films on TV. This is your sleeping time, so, stop this nonsense.*

G.: *Educator, please, let us watch TV tonight, please, only one more time!*

E.: *It is impossible! I also said last time that they shouldn't allow this! It'll become a habit.*

G.: *It was two weeks ago!*

E.: *No, it was last Wednesday. I am going to stick to our agreement! Close the door!*

G.(behind the door): *We will watch this film anyway! ... You can't prohibit us! ... You can't do anything! We are not in a kindergarten here! We'll put the TV on anyway!*

E.: *You know very well, what will be the result of that!*

— *After a few weeks, the girls asked again for an approval to watch TV. One educator prohibited it. Then the girls came to me and gave me a piece of paper to sign. I read it and there was a written approval to watch TV. I refused to sign it.*

*The girls turned away, they even did not protest with me as with the other educator in the scene described above.*

*The night-watch(wo)man came and I left the dormitory.*

*The next morning I asked how had the girls behaved at night. "Everything was OK, — she told me, — they watched the night film on the TV and after that went to sleep without any problems." (III.8.)*

How to explain this kind of activity? Was it a lack of trust in other staff members, or a fear of losing authority over the residents? No doubt the member of the management in question was the most popular staff member among the residents, and girls who had problems liked to turn to her. She also had the power to decide whatever she wanted to. The headmistress supported her initiatives.

In regard to how people communicated with each other at the institution, it was noticeable that in general people avoided direct talk.

I very often felt that up-to-date important and relevant issues were bypassed and replaced with mundane conversations of less important matters. As a result, there was a sense of people 'playing at communication'. This caused people to be wary of each other — nobody trusted the others because everybody sensed that their conversation partner was not candid and honest. In this connection, it should be specified that in their private lives all the staff members were kind people, they got on well with each other and made good neighbours, but work hardly ever appeared as a topic of their conversations. There was a strong general opinion that everyone had to manage with her duties on her own. To turn to a colleague with one's own problems could be seen as weakness and inability to manage one's own work. Naturally there were situations when the staff members discussed an individual case of a resident, but this was in order to solve an immediate problem rather than making any kind of an analysis and find more long-term solutions to the girls' situations. For instance, educators willingly switched shifts with each other, or helped out with the duties. Nevertheless, when there was a question of discussing and solving problems, the staff was very territorial and refused to deal with problems not directly concerning them. The following description illustrates the notion:

*"The burned bed. In a bedroom of some Russian girls, somebody set a bed on fire. One of the managers discussed the incident with me in the presence of another educator. The girls who lived in the bedroom in question were not in my group. The manager and I were talking about how to get to the bottom of the incident, to know why it happened and who was the culprit. I said that we should convene all the Russian girls together and speak with them about what happened. The manager liked the idea and we finished the discussion with a decision to convene the girls. After the manager had left the room, my colleague who had not said a word during the entire discussion turned to me and asked: "Why does she discuss this problem with you? You are not those girls' educator! Why doesn't she solve the problem with their educators?" I was really surprised by her reaction, because I thought that everything that takes place in the institution concerns all of us. I was also an educator for Russian residents, even if not exactly to the girls who occupied that particular bedroom." (III.9.)*

I have attempted to find an explanation for my colleague's reaction.

One reason may be a general dismay at the thought that if someone agrees to increase her workload by solving problems not directly concerning her, the rest of the staff will also be expected to do so. In a situation where staff has a lot of work but only limited resources, it is quite understandable that they are reluctant to take additional duties onto their shoulders. Probably I also broke some rule about the distribution of the areas of duty of the educators, or about intervening in the territory of others. Perhaps this is a specific unwritten rule of total institution (Wardhaugh & Wilding 1993). However, why then the manager initiate this conversation? Maybe it was tied to a desire to change the operation of the institution towards being more open and comprehensive, and she made an attempt to begin new kind of cooperation. The educators told me several times that they did not believe in change. They often narrated sad experiences in connection with the innovations of the management. This was the basis of unwillingness to work in cooperation but rather to holding on to the customary 'fulfilling of instructions' as a norm. Perhaps the underlying problem was connected with the new so-called 'democratic' management the rhetoric of which was contradictory to the actual operation of the institution, or perhaps it was the lack of human resources. The mid-level staff often talked about the fears they had about taking the risk of responsibility and initiative:

*"It could happen that I make a mistake, as X. did, and the heads will openly discipline me in front of the whole school, the girls, as it happened with her. ...How could I keep on working after such a public reprimand? Which girl is going to listen to me?" (I.21.Z.a.)*

The mid-level staff's appeal to restore order at the institution tells about the change in power relations at the institution. Previously, the division between the staff and the residents was strict, but now the situation had changed. This division gave the mid-level staff a better guarantee for their authoritarian position over the residents. They knew that the managers could never openly discuss the staff's activities with the residents. Now it had become possible, and the mid-level staff spoke about their sense of losing their confidence (power) in the relations with residents. However, the management's



position of power was reinforced as they attempted to diminish the power position of the mid-level staff and urged them to reconstruct their relationship with the residents on the basis of cooperation rather than authority. I return to the topic of power relations between the different actors of the institution in chapter 6, where I discuss the changes in the K. School in concern to its reorganisation and make comparisons between the Soviet-time institution and the 'new' one. Here I would only like to emphasise that the relations carry signs of transition, namely, the declared and applied values and their realisation is not always in harmony (in other words, there is a gap between the declared values and their realisation).

## 5.6. Free Time — Planned Entertainment

From the staff's perspective, the most difficult time came when the residents were free from work and study and did not have any organised activity to participate in. It seemed impossible for the girls to occupy themselves in purely social activities with each other. In the evenings when the residents had a few free hours, they loitered along the corridors and cried '*I am bored!*'. They often went to the educator on duty and asked for some work or other things to occupy their time. The educators mostly solved this problem by giving cleaning work to the residents to do. Sometimes the educator just suggested that the girls do some handicraft or to read a book. One possibility to alleviate the boredom was to prepare different events. The staff spent lot of time thinking about organising leisure activities. In this, the staff tried to take into consideration both the interests of the girls and the possible educational aims. The events were largely different shows, competitions, elections, parties, etc. The residents were busy with preparing for the events in the evenings. As a rule, participating in the preparation work meant learning different dances, songs and so on. The idea of the fashion shows was that the residents would sew dresses to show off.

Most of the residents like these events and participated with pleasure in the preparation work. The residents took them particularly seriously if they had to make a public performance. There was always a jury who made the choice of who were the best, and the

participants always received a prize of some kind. The jury members were people from the village who were somehow tied with the school (former teachers on pension, previous workers, male staff members who were usually not in direct contact with the residents, such as the engineer, etc.).

The educational/disciplinary aim of these enterprises was on the one hand that only those residents who behaved themselves well were allowed to participate. The so-called negative leaders did not participate in such activities. They observed the events with contempt and time to time made their ironic comments. However, they had the power to decide who actually did participate. The girls from the lowest level of the residential hierarchy did not participate either. On the other hand, the aims of these activities were connected with so-called female education, which topic was discussed earlier in this work (see chapter 5.4.).

The free-time activities could be divided in three general categories:

- visits outside of the school: theatre, museums, swimming pool, other institutions;
- events organised at school: shows, pageants, elections, (sport)-games;
- events connected with some special day, such as the birthday of a resident.

Some of the residents lived out these enterprises very emotionally: they became very agitated especially when sports were concerned. The possibility of losing caused particular fear. No one wanted to lose, but some had to; and these were also girls from lower level of the residents' hierarchy. This might be one of the reasons why the 'negative leaders' did not want to participate in any activities that involved competition. They were too afraid of being losers in front of girls from lower levels of hierarchy.

As I mentioned earlier, the free time activities were open only for residents who behaved themselves in a satisfactory manner. For instance, once a week the residents had the possibility to go to the swimming pool in town. There was a limited number of girls who actually had a chance to participate. One resident confided in me that she could never go into the swimming pool because of her bad marks at school, but she liked swimming very much.

Only well-behaved residents who also did well in school were allowed to go on the trips to the disco (dancing) parties at the T. Special Needs School for boys. The dances were organised in turns in the K. and T. schools and were tied with some important dates: Christmas, Valentine's Day, and so on.

The trips to T. were big projects. Only the trip itself took three hours in the little school bus. The bus left the school at three o'clock in the afternoon with ten to fifteen residents who were chosen to participate. When the girls arrived at T., they were first locked in a classroom when they could freshen up; change clothes and do their hair, and wait until the boys had had their dinner so they could have theirs. Boys and girls ate separately. After dinner both the boys and the girls went to the assembly hall and the evening programme began. The T. School boys had prepared performances appropriate for the time. I accompanied the girls to T. on Valentine's Day. That time, the boys had prepared a long programme which included a poetry recital, dance performances and games similar to what the young people saw on television. After the programme, the boys and girls danced together. Many boys had handmade presents for the girls (some wooden stand for flowers). The young people danced in the big assembly hall under the supervision of teachers and educators. The boys handed notes (brief letters) to the girls. On the way back to K., the girls counted how many letters each of them received.

After such meetings many residents corresponded with the T. School boys. These relationships were generally accepted by the staff members, while the correspondence partners from prison, which some girls had, were categorically rejected by the staff in spite of the fact that the girls preferred them. It was evident that for the staff members there was a great difference between the special needs school and prison.

The biggest problem with regard to going to the theatre was what clothes to wear. The residents' were dressed mostly in second-hand clothes, which wore out quickly. Moreover, the clothes were largely casual sport outfits. There were some residents who declined to go to the theatre because they did not have appropriate clothes. A teacher who accompanied the girls to the theatre told that the girls



felt very uncomfortable in the theatre and embarrassed about being different from the rest of the audience.

The biggest party that also marked the end of the school year was the Miss May beauty pageant. This event has become a tradition since it started in 1994. The preparation for the party took several months, and the number of participants was large. In addition to the Miss May candidates there were also dancers and singers. Thus, the event lasts almost the whole day and involves almost everybody at the institution.

It was a very nice sunny day in May of 1997 when I participated in this big event. Everyone at the institution was excited already in the morning. There were also guests present from Finland. They came from a Finnish institution of a similar kind that was the friendship institution of the K. School. Four young Finnish residents were supposed to participate in the pageant. One of them changed her mind at the last minute and refused to participate, but the remaining three competed for the Miss May title with the K. School girls. The Finnish group had arrived the day before. A dance group of boys from the T. Special Needs School was also expected. It arrived later in the morning.

When the girls saw me, they ran to me and asked if I had seen the Finnish girls. When the boys from T. arrived, the girls were hanging from their windows to get a glimpse of them. V. gave me a bouquet of flowers and asked me to meet the guests from T. The boys also brought equipment to play music for the disco that was to be arranged in the evening. Separate rooms in one wing of the school were prepared for the boys. From there, they had access to the assembly hall where the event was going to take place. The boys had to rehearse their dances, but at that time the hall was occupied by the girls who rehearsed their parts.

The beauty pageant took a long time. There were different performances in which almost everyone of the residents participated dancing and singing. The Miss May candidates, six girls who had been chosen for the finals in preliminary election, had to demonstrate their beauty, knowledge and skills in different areas. They appeared in different dresses, introduced themselves, spoke about their hobbies, and demonstrated their various skills for instance in handicrafts, dancing, singing and speaking. The entire show was led

by one of the school teachers with the assistance of two social work (male) students from the University of Tartu. The boys from the T. School, who were very good dancers, performed in between. They also accompanied the Miss May candidates in a waltz that was part of the performance. The jury did its' duty. Some special prizes and the prize for the favourite of the audience were also awarded. The winners received presents and the new Miss May was given the Miss May trophy to keep until the next year's pageant. The whole event was videotaped. In the end the teachers and educators who participated in preparing the beauty pageant were given flowers.

After the performance the staff had coffee with the visiting staff members from Finland and the T. School. It was a nice day and a pleasant end of the school year. Even though there were still some school days left and the girls had to do their final exams for the school year, it was in a certain sense a test of the results of the educational work of the year.

## **5.7. Prohibited Fun and Solving Problems Regarding Them**

### **5.7.1. Smoking**

Smoking was an interesting phenomenon at the K. School. Almost every one of the residents smoked. There were some girls who wanted to stop smoking and they complained how difficult was to try to do it in the institution, which surprised me because smoking was strictly forbidden. Obtaining cigarettes was a complicated and difficult thing to do. All of the bags and parcels that came to the school were checked by the guards. The only way for the girls to get their hands on cigarettes was through some illegitimate way. One way was to pick up cigarette butts on the roads. The residents took the tobacco out of the butts and rolled hand-made cigarettes. The best paper for this was the very fine pages from the Bibles that were brought to the institution by different religious missionaries. These cigarettes were good enough for young residents and for the 'lower class'. The leaders had their own way to get cigarettes, and they also formed the basis of the profit they made from the other girls.

Smoking was a punishable activity at the school. Nevertheless, every staff member was well aware of the fact that the girls smoked. The girls smoked in the toilets. From time to time, most educators made check-up calls to the toilets, and if any evidence of smoking was found at any time by any member of the personnel, all the smoking paraphernalia had to be confiscated: cigarettes, tobacco, lighters and matches. It seemed that there was a constant war against smoking at the school. However, I often heard one or another staff member remarking: *"The girls are very nervous, it seems there are no cigarettes at the house"*. In any case, the residents did not even try to conceal their smoking. They spoke openly about 'samokrutka', and even told stories about all the possible ways of getting cigarettes inside the institution. Sometimes the management even made it possible to buy cigarettes. For example, after a mutiny when the residents had proclaimed a strike, the next day two of the leaders and organisers of the strike were allowed to walk alone to the village. *"They were very nervous. We thought that maybe they will calm down if they take a little walk."* (I.6.F.d.) — was the justification.

In the same evening one of the girls who had walked to town at noon escaped. The other one stayed in her room. I asked her why she did not accompany her friend. She smiled mysteriously and answered: *"I already got what I wanted"*. The other resident was a drug addict and every now and then needed something stronger than cigarettes.

We discussed the topic of smoking also during the interviews. There were staff members who were of the opinion that smoking should be allowed in such institutions, while other staff members were categorically against this. *"They are children after all. How can we let them smoke? And who will buy them cigarettes? As a mother, I cannot do it."* (I.10.J.d.)

Another argument for why smoking should not be allowed in the institution was that if smoking would be permitted, the residents would start demanding other things: alcohol and males. *"You know, we have girls here who worked as prostitutes."* And finally: *"If we allow them to smoke they will burn the house down."*

Those who believed that smoking should be allowed said that there are too many tensions tied to smoking when it is prohibited. It



is out of control and involves corruption. If smoking would be allowed, it also could be controlled better. However, only a minority thought this way. The same phenomenon was apparent also elsewhere. The new Law on Incarceration (1.12.2000) prohibits smoking also in youth prisons.

### 5.7.2. Violence

As was mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, there were a lot of informal relations between the residents which created the hierarchy among them. This residential subculture was built on violence. How such subcultures function in closed institutions (first of all in prison) is a widely studied phenomenon. Belknap (2001: 186–191) analyses the differences between the male and female prison subcultures on the basis of studies which show that female subcultures are more or less as violent as male ones. Pollock-Bryne (1990: 130) points out:

*"The prisoner subculture is a subterranean culture that exists within but is distinct from the formal culture of the prison society. It is the sub rosa culture of norms, values, and social roles. This system of power and interchange occurs among prisoners more or less outside the control or even knowledge of prison officials. ... Every institution has a separate prisoner subculture. Each subculture is moulded and constrained by several variables..."*

This description is quite fitting also for the K. School subculture. Even though the K. School is not a prison, the resident subculture had many resemblances to prisoner subculture. Its foundation was in the power relations between the residents. Power largely correlated with the time spent inside, but there were also other factors linked to it. The most important personal quality of a resident was her ability to adapt to the school circumstances (socialisation). This also meant accepting the residents' value system, in which respecting and honouring 'older' residents played an important role.

When a new girl arrives to the institution, the 'older' residents coerce her to submit to their rule. The new resident's personal qualities are carefully assessed; if she shows assertiveness and

strength there is the possibility to climb higher up the hierarchy. For this, an essential piece of knowledge is how to react to violence in the correct way. There are certain concrete things that one should never do, such as complain to the staff about the residents' inside relationships. Those girls who did not grasp this knowledge remained among the lower levels of the hierarchy the entire time of their stay at the institution. To remain on the lower level meant that having to do the most dirty work, to serve others and to be a subject of violence by the others. The residents frequently became angry. The circumstances in a closed living environment and narrow possibilities to satisfy one's needs made them constantly aggressive. Taunting and bullying others is one possible way to direct the anger and calm down. Using scapegoats was a popular way of solving problems.

There were four to five residents who were habitually beaten and otherwise terrorised by other residents. In my own group there were two of those girls. Especially one of them, B., suffered because of aggressiveness from the other girls in the group. The victimised girl was in constant terror of others and always tried to stay near me when I was on duty. I thought it was my duty to protect her. First I just let her stay near me, but I did not do anything that would indicate that I knew about the violence. However, once something happened that forced me to react openly. One of the bullies entered the scapegoat's bedroom and forced her to open the window and sit on the window ledge. She threatened to drop her from the third floor window. When I came to know about this incident, I tracked the tormentor down and told her she was a coward if she picked on girls like B. *"Why don't you threaten somebody who is stronger than you? A great hero you are to torture poor B.!"* She was very insulted and mad at me. After that not only her, but also some others from my group continued torturing B. even worse and declared a boycott towards me. What really surprised me was how the staff reacted to this incident. B. was sent to isolation and she could not go to school for more than a week, because those who are in isolation were not allowed to be in any contact with the other residents. The 'old' and experienced staff members knew more about the residents' subculture and were very reluctant to disturb it. I could not understand the reasons behind such a blatant turning of a blind eye on the residents' mutual relationships. Perhaps it can be explained with the

fact that the staff used help from the residents in managing them. Dealing with the residents was very difficult without sometimes making concessions to and compromises with the leaders of the resident subculture.

Some time after the above-described incident with B., the other educator of my group decided to organise a group meeting to discuss with the girls the constant terrorising of B. and how to solve the problem. There is a description of the meeting in my field notes:

*"Open discussion of violence between the residents. B.'s case*  
*The class sat together with the teacher in a classroom. To begin with, the girl under discussion (B.) was not present. The other girl (the bully) did not want to come to the meeting, but the teacher called her. At first she sat in the far corner with her back turned to the others.*

*Teacher: S., should we speak to your back?... So girls, we should be ashamed as a class that we can't cope with B. She is in solitary this week, and it's not for the first time. What can we do with her?*

*Some residents together: I don't know... she is so hateful... I hate her... Why is she in our class? We don't like her... Let her stay in solitary...*

*T.: No, that's no solution. We have to do something about her. She has to go to school.*

*R.: She smells!... She's an utter imbecile... She is just an idiot... She makes me so mad!*

*T.: What shall we do? We can't banish her from school. It's not up to us.*

*R.1: Do you remember when she first came and nobody wanted to stay in the same bedroom with her? I took her in and explained that she would have to wash and do her laundry. But she didn't do it. We found dirty knickers everywhere...*

*R.2.: Yes, she is dirty and smelly...*

*T.: It is her biggest problem, don't you think?*

*R.1. Yes, let her wash herself!*

*T.: Who will look after her? K., maybe you will?*

*K.: No, no, I hate her; I can't, I'll kill her.*

*T.: Maybe you, A.? (both of those girls were friends of S. who had terrorised B.! and I had seen K. beat her)*

*A.: I don't know if I could cope with it.*



- T.: *The other girls and I will help you.*  
A.: *OK, but I won't be responsible for her.*  
T.: *No, you just keep an eye on her and make sure that she washes herself, and keeps her things in order.*  
A.: *OK, I can do that.*  
T.: *OK, somebody, ask B. to come in.*  
B. *comes in and stands in front the other girls, her head lowered.*  
T.: *So, B. we have discussed your case and decided that you have to look after yourself. A. will help you and check that you do so.*  
B. *stays quiet.*  
*Some residents: do you hear what she's telling you?*  
B. *doesn't answer.*  
K.: *Why don't you answer when you are asked something? Look at me! Do you understand what I'm saying to you?*  
*One of the girls goes up to B. and pushes her on the forehead. The other girls are also taunting: „She's furious!“*  
T.: *(to the girl) Don't do that! (to B. quietly) Did you understand?*  
B. *in low voice: Yes*  
K. and A.: *I didn't hear anything!*  
B. *(with a little bit louder voice): Yes.*  
Girls: *Louder! ...” (III.7.)*

During this meeting, it became apparent to me how the conflicts between the residents were solved at the K. School. The real problem was replaced by a quasi-problem. The real problem — aggressiveness towards weaker residents was ignored. Even the conflict between the new educator (myself) and S. was ignored. B., who was the victim in the situation, was removed from the discussion of her case. She was not only deprived of the right to participate in the discussion and tell her version of the events, but she was blamed as the cause of others' violence, and she left the meeting as a scapegoat. She was guilty for the other girls beating her because she was dirty.

As a result, the other girls also received a twisted (corrupted) reflection of information about their problems. In fact, the problem of the torment was ignored; nobody discussed it. Other residents were provided with a pattern of how to 'manage' anger, and a reaction that it is acceptable to vent frustration and to try to calm down by fighting and taunting those who were weaker. The torment itself is

only a symptomatic reaction, a way of finding a temporary relief to the problems that were inside those aggressive girls. Such a problem-solving model does not deal with their real feelings and provides them with no positive means to deal with their anger. On the contrary, it confirmed a behavioural skill: if you feel frustrated and angry you can find somebody to beat up to calm you down. The other skill that everybody learned in this case was the practise of twisted and corrupted way of speaking; the practise of substituting real issues and topics of discussion with something else. This corruption of speaking was an eccentricity of the institutional conversations. It will be illustrated also later with examples from my field notes in regard to escaping.

### 5.7.3. Escaping

The most serious offence a resident could commit was to escape from the school. The punishment was three days in isolation. During my field work period, there were six attempts at escape, most of them were organised by Russian girls, and a fair number of residents participated in them.

Sometimes attempts to escape is just a game, however, a very dangerous one, such as escaping through a third-floor window using a long corridor carpet as the means. Once the girls practised going down on the carpet both at night and in broad daylight for three days before the staff realised this and hid the carpet from them.

The most common method of escape by the Estonian girls was not to come back after a home visit, or to run away from the institution either alone or in pairs. The Russian girls organised collective escapes. One of such organised escapes proceeded as follows: On Saturdays the girls went to sauna. The sauna was located about 100–150 metres away from the main building, outside the school territory. Because the sauna was small, that night there were as usual four sauna turns. The girls who planned to run away arranged it so that they had the last turn. The episode took place during the winter, and when the last girls went to sauna it was already dark outside. The escape attempt involved 17 girls. When the staff realised what had happened, they immediately organised a search party to go

after the runaways. Except for one successful girl, they managed to bring everybody back to the school. The girls who either return from their escapes or are caught in the process have to write an explanatory essay and describe in detail why she ran away and what happened during the time she was gone.

One of these runaways from the sauna incident, who was a new resident, had written later after she was taken back to the school:

*"I didn't want to escape, but the older girls forced me. We, the 'new' girls, had to begin to run away and the 'olds' were planning to run after us and pretend they were going to catch us and bring us back to the school." (II.1.N.e.)*

The idea was that the 'old' girls, who went after the new residents should be not punished in case the plan would not work out. This girl had written the truth. After this occasion the girl became an object of general contempt. She was punished by other girls for telling and by the staff for escape.

During a conversation the girls told about the forced escape in more detail:

*"I felt so bad. The girls came and spoke to me: 'Can you imagine how good it will be with grandma...' I knew it was wrong to escape, but I wanted to be with my family so much. I had written two letters to grandma and she hadn't answered, only today I received her letter. ... At first I felt bad when I ran but then I recognised the city lights and I ran further and further." (II.1.N.e.)*

The explanatory essays were quite formal and included such information that the staff expected to receive. The first thing that should always be written was an expression of regret about the event. The next one should be a promise not to do that again in the future. The essays gave little information about the reasons and circumstances of the escapes.

I had the opportunity to observe a discussion concerning two girls who returned voluntarily after having escaped. Voluntary return was a new phenomenon at the school. The most active resident in organising escapes was a drug addict girl, who planned and arranged collective escapes several times. She was also high-spirited in constantly protesting against various things. When she was brought back



from her escapades and punished, she took her punishment with a loud protest. In isolation she behaved aggressively: banged and battered windows and walls, and screamed. No punishment had any effect on her. A stop was finally put to her tantrum by the management calling the police who took her to the town jail for overnight. When she was brought back, she even bragged about the escape and was enraged with the staff and the management. After a few days she escaped again with five other residents. But this time she used other tactics. She called the school and told the manager on the phone that they should not worry because they were going to be back soon. It was important to inform the management because the residents had to pay the costs of their retrieval from their escapes themselves (the petrol costs). The next day she called again because they were still not back, and she was afraid that the management was starting to search for the runaways. Two of the runaways came back in two days, and the two others (both drug addicts) returned after four days. The last two of the escaped residents never returned. One of the managers spoke to the two drug addict girls right after their return in her room. I was present by chance.

In their explanatory essays the residents wrote about the circumstances of their escape, where they stayed and what they did during that time. Three young men in a minibus gave them a lift. They drove to town and took the girls to a flat where they were drinking and partying all night long. The next day they spent out in nature and went to another flat for the night. The following day the two girls who never returned to the school left, and the rest had no idea where they might be at that time. But these four continued the party.

*"The conversation: (M. = manager; P. and J. = residents)*

*P.: There were three young men, two of them were Estonians and one Russian. S.(the Russian man) also offered me drugs, but I told him I don't use them any more.*

*M.: What drugs did he offer you?*

*P.: He had different kinds. He asked what I had used before. I answered that poppy. He told me that it is possible to get it, but I told I don't want to use drugs any more. And he left me in peace. Then they also offered 'a job' to me and Z. He said they'd give us a flat with two bedrooms and a telephone and men would call and we should just take them. They told us it*

*is possible to earn six thousand kroons and live a good life. But we said no right away.*

*M.: You have a hickey, P.*

*P.: No, there was just a boy, 13 years old, but he wanted to behave as an adult man and he did it. But we were just fooling around.*

*M.: Please, write everything down as you are now telling me. ... You know, P. you've something, nevertheless. You see, you are a strong person! They offered drugs to you and you refused, they offered a fun job to you to do, and again you were able to refuse even though that must have been hard! You called us every day and finally you returned! You are a strong person and you can stand on your own two feet! ... What do you think girls, can you sleep well tonight?*

*P. and J.: Yes.*

*J.: And you know, we even missed K. We thought, it would be interesting, what they are doing now? Maybe they are going to look for us?*

*M.: OK, girls go now and sleep and tomorrow we'll continue this conversation." (III.11.)*

The first impression from this conversation seems to be positive. It seems that the relations between the staff member and the residents is confidential. They try to tell to each other positive and pleasant things. The residents narration is quite reliable. They recognise that they had fun and enjoyed it all, things like drinking vodka. The residents know very well how far they can go in telling the truth. And the manager knows that, too. She understand that the girls in fact do not tell the whole truth. It is evident that those three young men in the minibus were waiting for the girls — it was an arranged escape. It would be very strange if just a casual car picked up six girls from the road side and took them along and spent four days with them. It would be also quite strange that IV drug addicts with experience of injecting for perhaps a year refused an offer of drugs. And how does the manager react to the girls' story? She praises them. She compliments them. Why? Was it sarcasm? Perhaps she wanted to let them know: 'I know you are lying, you are not strong people, you are just weak girls dependent on drugs. I know what were you doing all these days, but I'll claim that I believe you and you know

that it isn't so.' Or maybe it is a play: 'OK, let's play this game now — you lie to me and I pretend I believe you. I don't need to go to the trouble of punishing you. Thanks girls, it makes my job easier. There's only two weeks left before school ends, and after that you are out of here. I want to spend the rest of this time in peace.' Or perhaps she did believe the girl and her compliments were genuine? Unfortunately, I cannot say anything definite because I did not ask the staff member what she really thought about the case, and what was her aim with the compliments. Perhaps, if I had asked, she would have answered me that she did not believe the story told by the girls, but she wanted to support them and to make their return pleasant. All of this is just guesswork from my part, but I must say my emotions at the time of the scene were confused and not very pleasant. I sensed manipulation from both sides, and again I had the feeling of a twisted topic of conversation. To the compliment from the manager's part, the girls answered with a compliment of their own: they confessed they had been missing the school. I felt very sad because P., who was one of the negative leaders — a very smart and complex girl, made a lot of trouble but was always honest and sincere even in her trouble-making behaviour. By protesting against the school order she pointed out the weaknesses in the institutional relations. If the staff had analysed her behaviour and her reactions more deeply, they could have learned much about the defects in the organisation of the institutional operation. During this conversation it became apparent that at least the institution had taught her how to manipulate.

In fact, the manager was very angry. This anger was expressed the next morning, when two other girls, twin sisters, were expelled from the school. These two events, the discussion between the manager and the girls, were obviously tied together, because the twin sisters had already returned two days earlier and were left in peace until the organiser of the escape turned up. They were not even put in isolation, which usually is the inevitable consequence for escaping. Naturally there might have been other reasons for that, too, which I was not aware of.

In concluding this chapter I would like to emphasise the following points, which seemed to be the most important with regard to the institutional activities.



First. The function of the institution's daily activities appeared to be first of all to occupy the residents' time in order for them not to have time for antisocial activities (prevention through the diversion method).

Second. The educational character of the institution was continuously emphasised. The institution was first of all a school which provides primary education. However, this aim was not adequately reached because of the different problems in its realisation dependent on both the outside (all-the-year-round acceptance of residents) and inside circumstances. In connection with the circumstances inside the institution, there is reason to point out there was no special needs education programme at all, which certainly would exist if the residents' problems, such as long absence from school, poor learning skills, deep gaps in academic knowledge and low intellectual capacity due to a multiplicity of reasons, had been properly considered and met.

Third. Education and schooling in Estonia are traditionally important values. This is tied to the long-term history of the country, as well as the Soviet value system. The saying that without education a person is nothing is a typical Estonian saying. However, nobody at the institution seriously believed that the primary education given by the K. School was the needed resource on which basis the residents' future success in life could be constructed.

Fourth. The educational (upbringing) function of the institution was realised first of all as oral teaching of the 'correct' behaviour to the residents, a method which has few confirmations in behavioural modelling.

Fifth. Informal relations between the residents created a subculture which was built on power relations, and as such, added to characteristic of the K. school as a total institution.

Sixth. The activities at the institution were organised not as a response to the real needs of the residents based on deep and continuous study and analysis of them, but on an abstract thinking pattern about what seemed to be important for a person for coping tomorrow, namely, the operation was based not on reality or the actual, present context, but on theoretical thinking. However, in concern to the so-called female education the staff's activities had a quite real-

istic basis. However, personally I can not agree with such development of girls' personalities.

Seventh. There was a clear absence of the essential co-operation between the staff members on the different levels, which revealed an absence of trust toward one another on the professional level: people were afraid to discuss professional matters with each other because of the irrational notion that a successful professional must cope with her/his professional duties by him/herself.

Eighth. Simultaneously with all of the matters mentioned above, there were many attempts to change the situation at the institution and to begin to operate in a new way. Many new ideas, however, were experimented with merely on the basis of learning-by-mistakes method.

How these attempts are expressed both verbally and in practice will be discussed in the following chapter.

## 6. THE CHANGING INSTITUTION AND THE RHETORIC OF CHANGE

In this chapter I focus on the process of the construction of change at the institution by analysing the actors' rhetoric.

### 6.1. Rhetoric

Rhetoric is understood as a form of instrumental discourse (Gill & Whedbee 1997), where argumentation and the persuasion of audience are the focus (Harré 1985). Human thinking is rhetorical (Billig 1991: 3) because thinking is based on language and on its (language) dialogical nature (Bakhtin 1979, 1998: 302–5). When people think and communicate they react to other people's messages, share other's thoughts or discuss with them. People also are looking for persuasion in their arguments through the reactions of the audience. Rhetoric belongs to the social reality and plays an important role in understanding the social activity of human beings especially in process of assuming roles.

Through the analysis of rhetoric it is possible clarify what the actors think about the phenomena and processes around them, or how they want to think about them, or what kind of image they want to create about their attitudes in the eyes of other people. The choice of rhetoric by social actors demonstrates their choice of paradigm in which they wish to join. Through rhetoric, social actors express their wish to belong to certain philosophical or ideological value systems. People as a rule do not create their own ideology and rhetoric, but join in an already existing one and use its terminology and argumentation (Billig 1991: 6–7). This takes place primarily through language, because the first thing people share is common vocabulary.



What exactly and how this happens is explained by Bakhtin most persuasively.

The Bakhtinian thought of the dialogical function of language helps us to understand both the content of rhetoric in general and its individual expressions. Through this, I find it important to emphasise the next points.

First, looking for the basic (minimum) unit of language Bakhtin focuses attention on dialogical character as the most important feature of human language, which follows from the communicative function of language. Starting from the communicative function of language he separates utterance as the basic unit of language. This basic thesis allows him to see a specific relation between language and the thinking process. The lines of the old linguistics from the 19th century departed from the role of thought in the specification of nature and functions of language. The old linguistics, in Humboldt for instance, placed on the greatest significance on language's nature as a pre-condition of thinking. Bakhtin arguing with this (Bakhtin 1979: 245) points out the communicative role and dialogical nature of language as its most important function in the development of thinking. He separates utterances as the basic units of language in use<sup>21</sup>:

*"Language is realised in the form of individual concrete utterances (oral and written) by participants in the various areas of human activity. These utterances reflect the specific conditions and goals of each such area not only through their content (thematic) and linguistic style, that is, the selection of the lexical, phraseological, and grammatical resources of the language, but above all through their compositional structure. All three of these aspects ... are inseparably linked to the whole of the utterance and are equally determined by the specific nature of the particular sphere of communication. ..."* (Bakhtin 1999: 121)

In this communicative function of language Bakhtin sees a very important activating function:

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<sup>21</sup> About the role of utterances as the basic unit of speech see also Austin (1999: 63–75).

*"The fact is that when the listener perceives and understands the meaning (the language meaning) of speech, he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude toward it. ... Any understanding is imbued with response and necessarily elicits it in one form or another: the listener becomes the speaker."* (Bakhtin 1999: 124)

In other words, language allows people to communicate with each other and stimulates their thinking. Bakhtin shows also that there is not a very big difference between spoken and written communication. If the reader understands the text that he/she reads, he/she inevitably reacts to that which is read in some way (agrees, protests, believes, argues against, and so on; in a word, communicates and thinks).

The issue of the connection between using language and human acts is studied by different disciplines (first of all by socio-linguistics) and creates a special interdisciplinary discussion (see, for instance, the works of Searle 1969, 1995; Habermas 1979, Schegloff 1984, 1999, Hymes 1974, Dore 1978, etc.)

Secondly, the Bakhtinian understanding of the communicative nature of spoken language is expressed in the nature of an utterance, its originality and bounds with other utterances or its connection with the context:

*"Any utterance is a link in a very complexly organised chain of other utterances, ...a link in the chain of speech communication. It is the active position of the speaker in one referentially semantic sphere or another. Therefore, each utterance is characterised primarily by a particular referentially semantic content. The choice of linguistic means and speech genre is determined primarily by the referentially semantic assignments (plan) of the speech subject (or author). This is the first aspect of the utterance that determines its compositional and stylistic features.*

*The second aspect of the utterance that determines its composition and style is the expressive aspect, that is, the speaker's subjective emotional evaluation of the referentially semantic content of his utterance. ... There can be no such thing as an absolutely neutral utterance."* (Bakhtin 1999: 124, 128)

In a word, any utterance is tied with the context, can be understood in this particular context and expresses subjective relations in regard to this context.

The connection of a speech act with its context is a generally accepted notion in different social science disciplines (see, for instance, Austin 1999: 63–75, Schegloff 1999: 107–120, etc.).

Thirdly, any given utterance has three aspects of meaning, which make the differences in meanings, namely, there are no absolutely identical meanings of different words used in different utterances by different speakers.

*"Neutral dictionary meanings of the words of a language ensure their common features and guarantee that all speakers of a given language will understand one another, but the use of words in live speech communication is always individual and contextual in nature. Therefore, one can say that any word exists for the speaker in three aspects: as a neutral word of a language, belonging to nobody; as an others' word, which belongs to another person and is filled with echoes of the other's utterance; and, finally, as my word, for, since I am dealing with it in a particular situation, with a particular speech plan, it is already imbued with my expression. In both of the latter aspects, the word is expressive, but, we repeat, this expression does not inhere in the word itself. It originates at the point of contact between the word and actual reality, under the conditions of that real situation articulated by the individual utterance."* (Bakhtin 1999: 129)

Bakhtin shows that language learning is a communicative act, that is, it takes place during interactions and human beings in this process do not learn the words of language, but the words of other people. So, we study language through other's individual utterances. Bakhtin's "other's word" was developed by Julia Kristeva who finds that every language text is made to be a "mosaic of quotations" (Kristeva 1980 in Gasparov 1996: 11).

Fourth, the variability of meanings is tied with historical, ideological, and authoritative conditions of social groups:

*"In each epoch, in each social circle, in each small world of family, friends, acquaintances, and comrades in which a human being grows and lives, there are always authoritative utterances that set*



*the tone — artistic, scientific, and journalistic works on which one relies, to which one refers, which are cited, imitated, and followed. ... There are always some verbally expressed leading ideas of the "master of thought" of a given epoch, some basic tasks, slogans, and so forth.*" (Bakhtin 1999: 129–130)

The third aspect of a word (utterance and, more broadly, the whole text) is connected with emotional and 'ideological' (term of Bakhtin) or rhetorical (in understanding of contemporary discourse studies and rhetoric analysis (Billig 1991, Burke 1989, Gill & Whedbee 1997, Hunter 1990, etc.) aspects of talk.

Before I begin with the analysis of the K. School rhetoric, there is reason to mention that first of all it is the rhetoric used by the staff. However, it is also the residents' rhetoric in the sense that they repeated a lot of the staff's verbalised concepts.

For the analysis, I separated the topics that appeared most frequently in the interviews and free conversations where the staff described the institution, as well as their argumentation which was used to persuade me as the audience that the characteristics of institution given by the staff is truthful and the only correct version. The most typical topic of the conversations in which the staff on different levels characterised the K. School was making comparisons between the institution in its current state with 'old' one, that is, before the reorganisation. The most important rhetorical point in these characterisations was the emphasis on the belief that the 'new' institution is greatly different from the 'old' one. Every managerial, mid-level and support staff member was unanimous on this issue. However, the evaluation of changes differed according to individuals. I would also like to stress the fact that these assessments of 'old' and the 'new' were made by the actors from the perspective of the present time, and they mostly concerned the 'new' institution despite the fact that in terms of amount there were more words said about the 'old' school.

## 6.2. The 'Old' and the 'New' Institutions

When speaking about the changes at the special needs school, the staff repeatedly used such expressions which constituted of peculiar key words in the characterisation of the 'old' and 'new' institutions, and these key words were in binary opposition (dichotomy). The emphasis on the differences of the 'two' institutions are important in the process of looking for an identity for the institution. It seems to be that the reorganisation starts with the opposition to the nearest past: opposing is more important than *consistency*.

This dichotomy emphasises differences between the 'two' institutions: the 'old' before the reorganisation and the 'new' after it. The characterisations of the 'two' institutions by different actors (staff members) were in general similar to each other, and differences could be detected in the different kinds of assessments of the same phenomena. The different assessments of the 'old' and 'new' institution depended on the relations of the speaker with the present management (those in power), because the new processes and phenomena were directly linked with the new management. Still, except for the new headmistress, all of the other managing staff members came from the old mid-level staff.

The general discourse of the staff on the 'old' institution was expressed in terms of authority and closeness:

1.

*"Before, our special needs schools were very closed and authoritarian. ... There was a lot of violence there... In fact, everything was done coercively starting from the morning gymnastics and ending with the uniforms. Nobody wanted to do it (gymnastics)" (I.12.G.a.)*

2.

*"Here in the school there was a lot of violence. And control, of course. ..." (I.16.P.b.)*

3.

*"Earlier the girls didn't get to go on any vacations. It was order, it was discipline. And they were punished more and more*

strictly. For any reason — immediately to isolation: for bad words, for shouting ..." (I.9.I.a.)

Authority meant coercion, violence and strong control. The authoritarian power unified all the actors on the lower level, intervening even in the private life of the staff members:

1.

*"Here at the school there was a lot of violence. And control, of course. Also we (mid-level staff) were under control. For instance, when we received the possibility of having telephones installed in the institution, the old head took only one number for the entire school even though it was possible to install phones in our homes as well. 'You shouldn't talk so much with each other' she said. She was afraid we would communicate behind her back. Any type of a relationship between us was condemned..."* (I.16.P.b.)

2.

*"We (the mid-level staff) had to be answerable to our superiors in everything... The girls were punished by their superiors and we were abused and humiliated by our bosses."* (I.8.H.d.)

The hierarchical relations at the institution are indeed aptly expressed by the common Russian expressions that even the Estonian staff members used in their narratives: *"We were called to the carpet"* (*"Нас вызывали на ковер"*) and *"We stand in front of our bosses in a row"* (*"Мы перед начальством по струнке стояли"* (idiomatic Russian, meaning "account for").

The 'old' school appears to us in negative attributes as an 'authoritarian' institution which is described in terms of 'violence', 'coercion', 'abuse', 'humiliation', 'punishment', 'control', 'closeness', etc. This was an especially negative experience for the staff because the authoritarian system was also reached out to the staff. There was a very strong vertical hierarchy where the people standing on the lower level had to obey their superiors blindly. The levels of the hierarchy were clearly divided, especially between the staff and the residents. Within the staff there was also a clear division between the management and the mid-level staff. Moreover, even the managers had different relationships with power. During an interview of



the former vice-head in education it became evident that even she was under very strong and authoritarian control and humiliation:

*"If you just knew how much I had to suffer by this S. (the former headmaster)! I ended up in a psycho-neurological hospital. ..."*  
(I.20.V.a.)

The conception of the 'new' institution as different from the 'old' one was expressed first of all by managers. The rhetoric here appears not so much in declarations of positive new terminology, but as denial of negative 'old' concepts. In other words, the description of the 'new' school should be understood in direct opposition to the old one. The notion seemed to be that if the 'old' institution was described in such terms as 'authoritarian', 'violent', 'humiliating', and 'subordinating', and also pejoratively assessed by the management, that should right there tell the audience that the 'new' school was different, quite the opposite as a 'non-authoritarian', 'non-violent', 'non-humiliating' and 'non-subordinating' place. However, this was the rhetoric of the management. The mid-level staff's opinion about the institution was more detailed, that is, there were more nuances of meanings.

The mid-level staff members also accentuated the authoritarian character of old school, but they did mention certain things that were better coordinated than at present; which, after all, made their lives easier. For instance, the middle-staff remembered the old school like this: *'It was terrible, but there was some order, nevertheless.'*

Some staff members really missed the *"strict regimen, punishment...":*

1.

*"Before there were no home visits allowed here, there was order, discipline! ... But now?... Now there is more freedom in here. I think it has become worse."* (I.9.I.a.)

2.

*"Now they have these home visits. This is good, on the one hand, but on the other, what to do with those girls who do not*

*return when they are supposed to? We can just take days<sup>22</sup> away from them, but I think there should be stricter punishment in this case."* (I.8.H.d.)

What was also more acceptable in the 'old' school for the mid-level staff was that the managers, despite repressive behaviour towards them, maintained the notion of solidarity with the mid-level staff in front of the residents. That means that the mid-level staff had more power over the residents, and in this were supported by the management.

There was a clear division to two opposite parts in 'old' time: staff on the one side and residents on the other. In the 'new' school the division was not as clear, which strongly disturbed the efficiency of the work in the mid-level staff's opinion. Currently, the residents were aware of the conflicts between different staff members, and especially between certain mid-level staff members and the management. The headmistress could reprimand a staff member in front of the residents (the case with X.) One scene concerning the public discussion about a staff member who made a mistake in dealing with a resident was described by an educator. The public discussion was led by the headmistress and took place in front of the whole school.

*"This could have never happened before, the head to discipline a member of staff in front of some of the girls. ... Oh, how they humiliate us! We used to be disciplined by the management before, but it was done privately, and the residents never knew about it."* (I.18.S.)

This new kind of public reprimand of anyone who made a mistake, even a staff member, reduced the mid-level staff's authority over the residents. That was why they were extremely afraid of this kind of reprimanding or discussion. The management expressly applied the policy that the staff should work together with the residents, and not to command them as before. The managers talked about this repeatedly, and this 'new working practice' was one of the most important kinds of new rhetoric at the special needs school. This

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<sup>22</sup> The main method of discipline was to give merits and demerits according to their behaviour. A certain number of merits adds a day for a future home visit, and the demerits eliminate them.

management's desire for the mid-level staff to work together with the residents, however, is not a new kind of rhetoric at all. Makarenko's (1954) pedagogical principles were based exactly on the co-operation of everyone who lived in the reformatory. In his "Pedagogical Poem" (1955) he describes the achievement of pedagogical work when everyone, both the teachers and the residents of the reformatory had to work together in order to survive the hunger and cold.

This kind of co-operation was the basis of the rhetoric of the Soviet collective spirit. However, even Makarenko found that such co-operation works voluntarily in extreme conditions of survival. In other conditions there appears to be a gap between the rhetoric of co-operation and the practice of subordination. Despite the need and desire for the teachers to act in co-operation, it was primarily realised through subordination. Both the staff and the residents voluntarily co-operated, but it was in subordination to the management's order to co-operate.

Working in the 'old' school was much easier for the mid-level staff in terms of a clearer and simpler regimen.

### 6.2.1. Two Types of Leadership

The former headmistress embodied authoritarian power. She held the post for almost the entire time of the 'old' school (1966–1990). The staff spoke about her as a symbol of that time:

1.

*"If you only knew our old headmistress! She was a real Stalin in a skirt."* (I.5.E.f.)

2.

*"She was a real tyrant. She had to know everything. As a rule the staff was always guilty if something happened and the staff was also punished for anything and everything."* (I.2.B.d.)

When I heard those characterisations of the previous head, I felt that now the people who were humiliated took their revenge on her for all the insults they had to silently bear before. At the same time,



it seemed to me that the basis for those descriptions was the old headmistress' position as an inevitable representative of the Soviet system. Her working methods were tied to the objective of maintaining control over the operation of the institution in order for it to be realised strictly according to regulations and instructions. She did not create any new conception of managing troubled adolescent girls. She was simply the one who executed the task. For her, the special needs school was a corrective institution the aim of which was isolation and the correction of young female delinquents in accordance with special instructions. This was precisely the reason that the headmistress' presence was felt to the ultimate degree in all of the activities. It was a legitimate manifestation of the Soviet policy of managing troubled young people. The same expectations also concerned the other staff members: they were supposed to simply follow the instructions. This is what made a good staff.

The styles of management of the two headmistresses differed greatly from one another. One important difference concerned their participation in the daily life in the institution. The 'old' headmistress had to control everything and be everywhere at the same time, be aware of everything that went on in the school, that is, participate actively in the school life, whereas the new headmistress delegated the managing to her deputies. For instance, she rarely directly communicated with the mid-level pedagogues, but discussed all the problems concerning the educational aspect of management with the head of education. During my fieldwork period, I never saw her participating in the educators' meetings or set foot in the dormitory in the evening. The residents spoke about their contacts with the headmistress as something extraordinary: "*Today I went to see the headmistress*". What the girls considered extraordinary in such a statement was the fact that it was extremely seldom when the girls were invited to the headmistress' office, and hence expressed it with a specific emphasis.

The new head almost never participated in the institutional activities, but only in the staff meetings in which the pupils' progress was discussed and the graduation ceremony in the end of the school year. She was not present during the free time projects, such as shows and the pageant described earlier. Some mid-level staff mem-

bers expressed their discontent with through the fact of the headmistress physical absence in the school's daily life.

The head's offices had a symbolic meaning:

*"The old headmistress' office was downstairs, where V.'s office is now — she was always there for all the events and activities, she had to be in control of everything. But now, where is the head's office? It is far from us. On the first floor in the school wing behind two doors! Who goes there?" (I.Z.B.d.)*

The former headmistress' office was situated right in the middle of the building, on the ground floor between the dormitory and the school. From the windows she could see the entrance gate and the school yard. Her overall control was based on the principle of the panopticon (Foucault 1991). Now the former office is a multi-functional room shared by the head of education who is responsible for the work in the dormitory, and staff members on duty. This was where the educators' meetings were held, as well as some of the classes and video demonstrations for the residents.

The new office of the headmistress was situated on the first floor, in the school wing of the building, behind two doors. Hence, the bureaucratic power was removed to the upper level and was even further distanced by two doors. The office was newly redecorated and furnished, a very nice room equipped with a computer, fax machine, phone, answering machine and other facilities. There was a large table in the room which I thought would be a good place for holding staff meetings, but not a single staff meeting took place there during my fieldwork period, they were held elsewhere either in classrooms or staff rooms. The windows provided a view of the deserted garden behind the building, seldom used by the residents and the staff. In brief, the new power was distanced from the subordinates and manifested through regalia. The difference between the rich equipment of the head's office and the poor facilities of the dormitory and the school demonstrates the importance of the new bureaucratic power and the contrast between the space reserved for the headmistress and the other part of institution. Eräsaari (1991: 170) points out the specific attributes of bureaucratic power in a Western-type of democracy as a location on a higher floor of the building, a spatial distance from those in a lower position and being

more richly equipped. Thus, also in this sense the new headmistress represented the new style of leadership.

However, the mid-level staff do not know about this peculiarity of the democracies in the Western world, and were not fond of these kinds of contrasts. In their understanding, democracy was tied with equality between the different levels of workers in the same organisation. Some of the staff members pointed out the head's priorities in the renovation of the building as a negative example of the new managing style.

Other mid-level staff members demonstratively emphasised that one must not speak about such issues, which in fact revealed their confusion with the new situation. At the same time, the residents spoke with proper awe about the 'nice office of the headmistress' which they could seldom visit but admired all the more. In their eyes, this nice office increased the esteem of the headmistress.

However, in spite of the distance between the headmistress from other parts of the institution, it became evident in the narratives of the residents that they knew about the headmistress and told me even quite intimate details of her private life. Their knowledge extended also to the other staff members. The residents knew not only about their private lives, but also about the conflicts between different staff members; who is whose friend or enemy. In contrast, some 'old' staff members emphasised that this could not have happened before during the time of the old management.

*"We (personnel) were taunted and punished, but the girls knew nothing about this. Ahead of them we all — teachers and managers — stood on the same platform" (I.16.P.)*

The residents were urged by the managers to report to them if and when they felt that a staff member treated them unjustly. The aim of such encouragement was to make sure that the residents knew they were protected by the management. As such, it was supposed to underline the rights of the residents, and was a part of the 'new child-centred' approach at the K. School. However, this inevitably evoked bad feelings among the staff: the sense of betrayal, fear, disappointment. Those who felt that the management betrayed them in front of the residents protested openly against the management's activities and decisions; they criticised almost everything the manag-



ers did and blamed them for the collapse of order, incompetence and using resources for their own benefit. Those who were afraid to give open criticism worked in a silent protest by ignoring the management's policies. The disappointed staff members demonstrated a pessimistic indifference: there's nothing we can do, nothing will change, it's not necessary to take the work seriously — their objective was to endure one day at the time and be left in peace as much as possible. They did not want to know anything. Once, when I wanted to explain the effect of labelling to a colleague of mine, she became angry and asked me not to talk like that because she did not understand a word and she wanted to know nothing about the 'scientific' explanations of different phenomena.

The new situation of exposure of the staff in front of the residents reduced the mid-level staff's authority over the residents, making them more vulnerable. Christie (1992: 85) writes about the dangers of controlling organs such as the police, and emphasises that one way of controlling it is "*to make the wielders of power vulnerable*". Among the ways of vulnerability he lists the equality of status, equality in qualifications, and close and accessible physical proximity. The first and the last are important points also in regard to the situation in the K. School. The managers attempted to keep the mid-level staff under control by positioning them more or less on an equal status with the residents. This equality was also supposed to give them the impetus to share the residents' lives. However, in this application of policy the managers were not ready to give up their own power. Quite the contrary; their power appeared to be further strengthened through the concept of dividing and ruling.

However, to return to the attitudes of the headmistress, she kept her distance from the school but expressed her expectations towards the staff with the term "sharing their lives with the residents". The mid-level staff had the same expectation toward the headmistress. During an interview and some free conversations with me the headmistress used the rhetoric of the new management and child-centred approach, but I failed to see her in any activities among the residents. It seems to be that for her as the head of the school, the child-centred approach did not mean the same thing that she expected from the mid-level staff. I made notes of my own attempts to get to know what this notion for meant to her as a headmistress.

In answer to my question "When are you satisfied with your work?" she said:

*"When the school solves its problems. I mean when the staff, the people, are successful in solving their problems. If I solve some problems, it does not help, the people have to learn to solve their problems by themselves." (I.4.D.a.)*

This extract represents a very important conception of the goals and content of helping in general and the helping professions particularly, which was prominent in the middle of the 1990s. This was a time when people who went into professional helping work (doing social work as employed social workers or volunteers) first experienced burn-out. The concern that too much was expected of helpers became an increasingly important topic<sup>23</sup>. After the first disappointing experiences in helping work that did not give people the satisfaction they expected, they began to think about it differently. And one attitude that spread very quickly was that just expressed by the head of the K. School. As often happens, the pendulum flew to the opposite extreme. If I cannot help then I'd rather not participate at all. The wish to help was replaced by indifference. This kind of oscillating movement in the understanding the nature of helping work is caused by various reasons, such as the lack of power-free or non-hierarchical relationships between colleagues. The notion of helping also in itself indicated ignorance and the helplessness of the receiver of help. Helping was seen as 'giving' or doing something for' other people in need, and also the task of evaluating this need was the helper's responsibility.

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<sup>23</sup> This discourse would be an important topic of analysis. Plenty of material is available in the form of newspaper articles that were published in the middle of the 1990s. However, no research has been done on the topic this far and it is also not a theme of this work.

### 6.3. The Rhetoric of 'Democratisation'

The time of change which started with the reorganisation of the school and the appointment of the new headmistress was named 'democratisation' by the staff members.

*"At the beginning there were only a few children, 40, in here. In the Russian time we had about 140 girls. Unfortunately the number of residents is rising — now we have more than 80 and all the time there are new girls coming. ...*

*So, in the beginning we tried to act in a democratic way: not to punish the girls so much, but that wasn't very successful and many girls ran away. But when those girls who were already here from the Russian time were gone, we could start with changes.*

*Previously the residents had no student cards and could not use discount tickets in public transport to travel home for the holidays. We also provided them with these (student cards)." (I.4.D.a.)*

Another teacher remembered this time differently:

*"Six years ago when we started with the more democratic school, it succeeded well, but then we still had those girls who had come here during the earlier times. They still remembered the old autocratic system and felt happy for this change, they helped us out. Nowadays it is impossible to win the girls over. For them democracy is the same than everything being allowed. As A. says she is an anarchist — to her there are no prohibitions...." (I.12.G.a.)*

A third staff remembered that when the 'democratisation' started *"they all ran away"*.

According to the first staff member, girls who were not accustomed to the old strict Soviet system of subordination were more ready for democratic relationships in a closed institution, whereas the second one stated the exact opposite: girls who had previously been under a strong authoritarian order were happy for the change and adapted better to the new system. I tend to believe in the third one.

However, all the staff members emphasised that in the beginning of the 'new' system the staff was more successful with the democratisation process than later on. Some staff members also spoke about



the new era that started six to seven years ago as a nice and promising period.

*"Three years ago the girls were better. We didn't have to punish them all that much...*

*— Yes, they were far fewer of them."*

It is evident in these extracts<sup>5</sup> that in the minds of the staff members the democratisation process was closely tied to either having to or not having to punish the residents, which depended only on their own behaviour. The success of carrying out the democratisation process depended on how well the residents were able and willing to co-operate with the staff: *'to help them deal with the residents without having to punish them'*.

### 6.3.1. The Rhetoric of Teamwork and the Practice of Indifference

The management not only expected the residents to fully agree to co-operate with the staff, but also that there would be collaboration among the staff members themselves. I frequently heard how important good teamwork between the staff members really was.

The next excerpt from my field notes describes an incident I had to deal with, and demonstrates the relations between the management and the mid-level staff. I was one of the actors deeply involved in this scene.

*"It was my second day at work when the first educators' meeting in which I also participated. Almost all of the educators of the school, including the other educator of my group, were present. After the meeting one of the managers turned to me:*

*'There's a girl in your group who misses home very badly. She asked me to call her home for her, please why don't you do it.' She sent another resident to fetch the girl in question to the meeting room. The girl was actually already standing behind the door. A short conversation took place between the resident and the manager:*

*'M.: Darling, did you want to call your grandma?*

*G.: Yes.*

M.: *Here is your new educator, give her the number, she will call for you. Do you believe me?*

G.: *Yes.'*

*After that I asked the resident what exactly I should say to her grandmother.*

Me: *Do you have some problems?*

G.: *I want to ask you to call grandma.*

Me: *OK. The number?*

G.: *Here you are.*

Me: *Is it a home number?*

G.: *Yes.*

Me: *Where is it?*

G.: *In N.*

Me: *And what should I tell your grandma?*

G.: *I want her to come here.*

Me: *Do you think it is possible? Will she come if you ask?*

G.: *I don't know.*

Me: *Now, it is quite expensive to travel by bus. How much does the ticket costs, do you know?*

G.: *Yes, it is ...kroons.*

Me: *Does your grandma work?*

G.: *Yes.*

Me: *But let's think what can we do, if she can't come?*

G.: *Then let my mother come.*

Me: *Does your mother work also?*

G.: *No.*

Me: *But what will happen if grandma tells me that nobody can come? What else could make you feel better?*

G.: *Nothing. If nobody can come here, forget it. (she shrank away from me)*

Me: *You don't need anything more? You only want somebody from your family to come and visit you?*

G.: *Yes, and if nobody can come, I need nothing.*

Me: *OK, let's try and ask your grandma.'*

*Grandmother told me that she can't come to visit the girl and neither can the girl's mother: 'She (mother) is in a very bad condition. And G. knows that my son doesn't work and I have*

no money for travelling. Besides G. I have two more children here to take care of. They were sent to a children's home, but I can take them for weekends. She knows that. I was expecting her to come here for New Year's, but she didn't come. It means that she has behaved very badly or otherwise you would have let her come for the holidays.

Me: Maybe she is not an exemplary girl, but often girls have problems because they feel very lonely here...

Grandma (becoming angry): I sent her a package!

Me: She needs a personal meeting with someone from home.

Gr.: No, it is just impossible.

Me: If you are sure that nobody can come here, please wait a minute, I'll ask her to come to the telephone, you just speak with her, tell her something good. Explain to her why you cannot come.

At this moment the other educator of my form, who had been nearby, came and told me: 'Girls have to pay for their phone calls and G. doesn't have any money.'

Me: But I called because M. asked me to do it.'

Unfortunately, the grandma had nothing nice to say to the girl. She started crying, threw the receiver on the floor and ran out from the room. I tried to catch her, but she didn't want to speak with me. After this incident this girl's attitude towards me became hostile: she didn't want to communicate with me at all and provoked me by hitting other girls when I was there. Once she told that same manager that I was a stranger, which the manager forwarded to me immediately.

Only a fluke changed her relationship towards me. One day she received a letter from her mother (which was the only letter written by her mother during the four years spent at the institution) and I was the one who gave her the letter — with this, I was rehabilitated in her eyes.

After this unfortunate telephone call, the girl's other educator who knew her and her situation better, told me that the phone call was a hopeless step from the beginning. The girl's mother was a drug addict and her grandma an alcoholic, too. I felt very stupid. I did not understand why the manager asked



me — not the other educator, who at the time was in the same room — to call the girl's grandmother, or why she didn't give us a possibility to discuss the problem together? How could I deal with girl whom I didn't know at all? I didn't know anything about her family background, about her personality problems, about her story. Later I learned that she had been in the institution already for four years, and had been only 11 years old when she was first sent there. She had very difficult experiences in early childhood living together with her alcoholic and, later, a drug addicted mother. Her behaviour at the institution became increasingly problematic as the time went by. During her first year in the institution she regularly visited home during the holidays. After two years she tried to escape from school more frequently, and her behaviour became more aggressive and violent. She terrorised the weaker girls, especially new residents. She protested to the staff in various ways. For instance, she defecated on the floor of isolation. She had a problem with bed-wetting. She was rigid and repressed, and it was very difficult to make any kind of a contact with her. I spoke about my worry because she refused to communicate with me at all. My colleague answered: 'Don't worry, G. is just a very difficult girl. She needs time to get used to you. When I started with their form, she didn't accept me either. But after a while she relaxed and now we can communicate without any problem at all. I think she needs psychiatric help. She is very ill'." (III.1.1.)

I consider this story significant for many reasons. First, it demonstrates how it is part of the managers' work methods to use impulsive problem-solving mechanisms. Secondly, even though I can not be sure if the manager in question used the girl's situation as a wake-up call for me who had just arrived in the institution (I indeed hope this was not the case), but it certainly demonstrates the relationship between the staff members largely based on indifference. Thirdly, it demonstrates how the managers (institution) 'integrate' a new per-

son into the institutional system, which is also connected with indifference<sup>24</sup>.

Even now when I recall this incident I am flooded with very bad feelings. Thanks to this little event, I learned to feel from the very beginning what an incompetent educator I was. My whole position at the institution was quite confused, because I should meet expectations that I had not encountered earlier in my own professional field. This raises the question of whether someone who simply wants to study residential care should be put in the position of a professional educator in the first place.

The manager goal still remains mysterious to me. Why did she give me this task? Did she want to check on my ability to solve problems of the residents? Unfortunately I didn't ask her then and there, because I was confused, lost and really felt that I am a poor problem-solver. Later, when I have been thinking about this event I have realised that this was another demonstration of the indifference people felt for each other, in this case for me and the other educator if the group. We were both stepped over in order to make an impulsive and unexpected attempt at something which had all the change of failing.

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<sup>24</sup> This event is also in other ways significant in terms of me being introduced to the field. The meeting took place the second day of my work in the institution and the first time I met the entire staff. I had prepared a brief introduction of myself and my work. However, there was never an opportunity to make the introduction, because the meeting started off with congratulations to staff members who had recently had birthdays, and progressed into a discussion of the actual operation of the institution and planning. Staff meetings were organised only once a month. Educators left the room before the meeting was over and generally everybody was busy getting on with their duties. When I realised that none of the managers was going to give me an opening for my introduction, I decided to get up and go on with it on my own. This was when one of the managers turned to me with the girl's problem of being homesick.

The fact that I was a new face at the school and participated in meeting seemed to be the most usual thing. I was even more shocked when I turned to different staff members to introduce myself, and they shortly answered that they knew quite well who I was and why I was there. They were well prepared for my arrival.

However, in comparison to other situations and events during my fieldwork period it is apparent that the question was not so much of an intentional wish to paralyse staff members, but of a lack of skills in organising and coordinating teamwork and co-operation among the staff. Perhaps the managers did good work with some residents, but did not necessarily have the multiplicity of skills that managing an institution of this size required.

### 6.3.2. The Rhetoric of Openness

One of the most important attribute of the 'new', 'democratic' institution was its openness, which was repeatedly emphasised by the staff members. The open gate was a very eloquent metaphor of openness. The openness was expressed by internal changes such as allowed home visits for those residents who behaved according to the school order, taking walks outside the school grounds, visits to the theatre, exhibitions and swimming pool; trips to the discos organised in the boys' special needs school; allowing contacts with certain people from the outside, allowing visitors, and allowing representatives of the media on school grounds. A few television programmes were made and broadcast about the institution which introduced the institution to the Estonian public (as well as the equivalent institution for Estonian boys) and several articles were published in newspapers<sup>25</sup>. The institution liked to be thought of as an open and well-known place for the Estonian public. This policy succeeded because the image of the institution in the eyes of an average Estonian citizen was quite close to the truth.

The school also suffered from a perpetual lack of staff. This is why every possibility to have people visiting the institution who would provide something for the residents to do or to participate in

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<sup>25</sup> There is reason to point out here that the media, on the trail of a popular issue that would sell well, did not always represent the special needs schools and the troubled children in them correctly or appropriately. I myself have had a bad experience with the media which falsified my own statements given about the K. School.



during their free time, and who would react positively to them was welcome.

The managers also offered work placements to people who were interested in the internal life of institution, which was the case of both the above-mentioned student of special pedagogy and myself. However, at the same time the school indeed was a closed institution which meant that the residents had to be under 24-hour supervision of personnel. Because there were only a few guards, the residents had to spend hours behind closed doors. Thus, the open gate and the locked doors respectively symbolised the wish to transform the institution to be more open and the actual situation of closeness that was dictated by the total nature of such an institution. (On the one hand, to change the institution to be more open would have meant hiring much more staff to carry out the constant duty of close supervision, and on the other hand, the more supervisors there were, the more closed the institution was in the eyes of the residents: their free time and time spent on their own without visible control would be further reduced.)

### **6.3.3. A New Attitude Towards the Residents — the Rhetoric of Child-Centred Approach**

The general processes of change were also manifested as a change in the staff's attitude towards the residents. They became more close to the girls and began to see that the causes of their problems were more complex than they seemed to be earlier. Some signs show that it was also earlier understood that it was not only the residents themselves who were to be blamed for their 'bad' behaviour (see, for instance, Kurm 1966: 37–39), but that there might be other reasons in the background. However, the official policy of dealing with troubled young people dictated otherwise. The official instructions for dealing with such young people excluded any emotional relationship between the staff and the residents and focused on strictly unemotional and professional conduct. The new child-centred approach was understood as an opposite to the previous so-called 'staff-centred' approach. However, the previous system did not officially admit its staff-centred nature (Makarenko 1955, 1954). The

relationship was supposed to be based on comradeship between the pedagogues and pupils, who should work in co-operation for the common good. The formal rhetoric of the 'old' system defined an ideal type of a human being as a goal towards which all children had to strive, and the task of pedagogy was to direct and lead the children in their effort. The pedagogues also had to control whether all kids were satisfactorily progressing towards the right direction in their development into a new type of a human being — the Soviet human being. I believe that the Soviet pedagogy was not child-centred, nor teacher-centred, but ideal-centred and ideology-centred. However, because teachers and educators were responsible for children's success in this aim, they had also more power over how the new, Soviet human being was created. This seems to be the reason why the managers position the notions of child-centred and staff-centred approaches in opposition to each other.

In their interviews the staff members who had long-term work experience at the school noted that at first, when these types of special needs schools were opened, they actively recruited highly educated pedagogues. It was assumed that good pedagogues with solid education were better equipped to cope with the young people that resided in the institutions. The importance of the high professionalism and cultural level of staff was also mentioned by other teachers. When they answered to the question of what constituted 'high-quality professionalism', the interviewees emphasised high theoretical knowledge as the utmost qualification. Emotions, such as compassion, were not included. However, the present managers pointed out on the contrary that the most important quality of a good personnel is its 'goodness' of heart and good will.

The managers explained repeatedly that in general, a child-centred approach meant that the operation of the institution should have the best interest of the residents as the point of departure rather than the staff's 'well-being'. The content of the notion of 'well-being' is explained in the following sub-chapter.

### 6.3.4. The Rhetoric of Care and Protection

According to the managers and mid-level staff, the most important attributes of child-centred operation of an institution were care and protection. These notions were related (dependent) to each other. Protection was the first aspect of care. Care and protection were tied to the general understanding of the basic needs of childhood that was repeatedly emphasised by the staff:

*"We are here to protect you", "You are here because you need protection".*

The protection of the girls took many forms. First of all the fact per se of being in a reformatory school, namely, behind locked doors, meant protection. The outside world was full of dangers for young girls. In general, the dangers included the company of bad friends, neglecting parents, abusive men, the inherent dangers of the residents' stormy puberty, and even their gender as such. All this justified the practice of strong control over them.

When I asked why the girls' letters were read and possibly censored before being given to them or, if they wrote them, sent, I received answers such as the following:

*"We read the girls' letters to help and protect them... If somebody receives a letter with bad news, we can prepare the girl for receiving that news, or clarify how much truth there really is in that..... There are also pedagogical aims: we can learn about the girl's attitudes through her letters..." (I.6.F.a.)*

The reading of letters was further explained as a method for better understanding and helping the girls, which could be interpreted as an aspect of care:

*"We read the girls' letters in order to understand them better. Through this we can get to know their families, friends. Maybe a girl has difficulties about which she cannot speak. They know that we read their letters. Often they write about a problem that they can't explain. Afterwards they ask: 'Educator, did you read my letter?' Problems don't always come through from only talking with them..." (I.1.A.a.)*



In spite of that fact the notion of care was strongly emphasised by staff members of different levels, the content of care was explained by most of staff members simply as providing the girls with sustenance, accommodation, clothes, and an opportunity to receive education and to receive help in solving different kinds of problems. This latter means that staff members listened to the girls and tried to calm them down when upset or agitated. Listening to the residents' problems was mentioned by many staff members as the most difficult task in their work. This became clear during my fieldwork period; it was apparent that the educators avoided getting involved in conversations that concerned the girls' problems. They explained to me that it was too hard to take in all those negative things that were connected with the girls' life experiences and their families. One of the educators, for instance, told me that there was no reason to speak about these things, because anyhow she had no means of helping the girls; she could not change their parents into something they were not and all and all it was better not to know anything about those horrors. I see this as a means of survival, a form of self-defence, from the staff's part.

The most important thing connected to protection was keeping the girls under control. In the institution the girls were indeed under strict control and this was evidently considered to be one of the essentials for their safety.

However, what happened simultaneously was that the dangers the girls in reality had to face inside the institution was not considered worthy of special attention in the staff's eyes. They did agree that some residents were constantly terrorised by others, but the explained it as an inevitable fact with which the girls learned to and just had to cope.

If the girls were considered to be protected from the dangers of the outside in the institution, and sent there in the first place for this particular reasons, it is interesting to have a look at how the school protected them from internal dangers, such as physical and emotional violence. A girl from my group spoke repeatedly about her fear that other girls will beat her:

*"— How is it possible that other girls will hit you? You are here under the staff's control for 24 hours a day.*

— *And how they can!*

— ?

— *They have beaten me several times already. They hate me.*

...

— *And when is it that the girls beat you?*

— *At night in bedroom, or anywhere where the educator can't see.*

*Can you please send me to isolation?" (II.27.)*

There were some girls, so-called scapegoats, who spent most of their time in isolation simply because the other girls repeatedly beat them up. They were the ones guilty for everything possible. When there was a theft, one of the scapegoats had to confess their sin. If a bed was burned, the first thing to do was to blame either A. or B. for that terrible deed.

Despite the strong emphasis on protection by the staff members, the girls were not protected from the internal violence they suffered at the hands of other residents. When the staff had to deal with such situations, the victim was accused. In chapter 5.7.2. I described how the victim of terror ends up as the guilty party when her case is discussed in a group meeting for girls and staff members.

A deeper study of the content of the girls' well-being revealed that it was thought in terms of subordination to the school rules. True, order was not always very consistent and strict and there were just as many rules as was needed for the general operation of the institution. Compulsory school uniforms were given up; the residents used their own clothes or clothes that the institution provided for them and which largely came from humanitarian aid packages. The girls were allowed to use their own private things, such as jewellery, toys and radios. Some girls were given a permit to keep small pets like hamsters, guinea pigs and white rats in their bedrooms, though those were few.

Hence, the opinion of the management was that it was in the girls' interests and a guarantee for their well-being to follow the school rules and obey the staff; it was the staff's duty to see to it that this goal was achieved; but the methods had to be different from the previous times of simple subordination. The staff should be able to keep the residents in line not by oppression and punishment, but with care (goodness). Trying to deal with the girls with goodness

as the point of departure was a very new rhetoric in the institution. This 'goodness' was described by different staff members as '*working with the whole heart*', '*be an enthusiast of one's own work*', '*treat the girls like a mother would*'. The discourse of maternity with concern to the work at the institution was heard repeatedly. For instance, as I described before, during a discussion of the problem of smoking in the institution and whether it should be allowed, the majority of the staff was categorically against such a proposition: "*And who would buy cigarettes for them? I, as a mother, cannot do that.*"

When I asked in the beginning, what should I do and how to act with my group of residents the senior educator of the dormitory answered: '*Just be there for them. Be there for them like you are at home for your own children: they'll come to you and discuss their problems. You just listen to them and help them in solving their problems.*' I received a very similar response to my request for someone to describe me the content of the educators' work with the residents: : '*I am here with the girls like I'm at home with my children. Speak with them and do your best to bring them up.*'

But what precisely does this 'maternal care' means in circumstances of a closed institution?

There were quite different understandings what a maternal relation means, but the most important and general conception was the traditional stereotype of 'a normal mother' who cares, protects and loves her children. According to this stereotype, one — as a mother — inherently can not be indifferent towards her girls. This approach to the role of the staff was quite logical if two specific notions about the institution are taken into account: first, the staff had no special training for working with these kinds of difficult adolescent girls; at best they had a regular pedagogical education completed a long time ago. And anyhow, the staff did not think it possible to acquire a special training or preparation for this work in the first place.

Secondly, the emergence of a new kind of residents also meant the emergence of new kinds of problems, complex and very hard to deal with, such as drug addiction. The staff had no training nor resources to find solutions to these types of problems. Acting accord-



ing to the principles of goodness of heart and benevolence was seen as the only hope for helping these girls.

A 'normal mother' who loves her children cannot let her children come to harm. In other words, on the rhetorical level the professional relations between the staff and residents in the institution were replaced with family relations: mother and child. In this relation the rhetoric of motherhood or 'treating the children like a mother' is directly connected to another rhetoric — the rhetoric of childhood which is a separate big issue. (There is reason to mention here that children's status in the society is defined on the basis of their dependence on adults, which means they are marginalised and even excluded from the society as individuals; see Donzelot 1980, Goldson 1997, etc. Perhaps in child-adult relationships the particular relationship of 'child-mother' has some specific qualities, but even these relations are characterised through power.) However, the materialisation of relations between the staff and residents is a well-known phenomenon from literature which is first of all connected with women prisons. Pollok-Byrne (1990: 113–4) describes the peculiarity and changes of tendencies concerning female staff in reformatories for girls and women comes to the following conclusion:

*"The more insidious tendency of the female staff in women's prisons is to materialise their relationship with inmates, treating them in a manner that does not recognise their adulthood. This tendency holds as true today as it did in the first reformatory for women in 1873."*

The conceptions about how a good mother should deal with the girls in the institution varied. There were two general understanding of what 'mother's goodness of heart' meant. One approach was that a good mother is a person who listens to and understands the child's problems, feels compassion towards her, and wants to do anything to help her. The notion of help was also understood in several ways, but the staff largely saw 'helping' as equivalent to finding solutions to the girls problems. This approach was rather a 'soft-hearted' understanding of a mother's duties.

The other approach represented the view that it was not possible to correct the girls' behaviour only with kindness. They need fastidious care, consistency and strong control. The first approach saw that

it is essential to change the resident's way of thinking and behaviour not with the means of coercion but by softer means of influencing them.

The notion of 'influence' was presented as a new phenomenon by the managers and positioned in opposition with the Soviet authoritarian subordination. However, the term is not new, because also the objective of the Soviet-time juvenile commissions was defined as influencing juveniles (see Alaealiste...1980: 15-7) This meant first and foremost that the staff have to listen to and talk with the residents; to understand their problems and to communicate with them.

One of the managers explained how she understood the word 'influence':

*"First of all, I listen to the child. It is very important to listen carefully and try to understand what is her problem... I think and analyse carefully every word. ... Then, what is extremely important, I make the child believe me. That is why I never lie to the girls. If a girl believes me, she is more agreeable to come along with me, I can influence her. It is more difficult with those children who have some kind of inborn negative attitudes or who were under a strong negative influence by other people earlier. Like, it is difficult to work with this Satanic girl. Only now is she starting to come along with us. ... Long-time experiences and feelings help me in this work. Sometimes I do or tell something unexpected. It helps, and of course humour. ... The most important is to deal with a child not using authoritarian methods. I take examples from life, I want to make the child believe me; I look into her eyes and down-right hypnotise her that I want to help her. And I always follow through what I say. As I told already I never lie to the child, so that the child believes I am not her enemy, but an oasis, where she can get help. ... I also observe individual children, study, think and analyse and suddenly feel what would be the right way to deal with her...."*

Thus, influencing a resident consist of the following factors:

- listening to the girl;
- understanding her problems;
- thinking and analysing;
- making her believe the staff member;
- telling the truth to the girl;
- making the girls believe that the aim is to help her.

The aim of influencing was to convince the residents that it was in their best interests to co-operate with the staff. This is why the residents should believe in the staff, they should become close to one another. The metaphor of 'mother' as the person most close to a child was tied with the management of the residents, and on the other hand, 'mother' was tied also with the applied metaphor of home. This was discussed in chapter 3.2. in connection to the representation of institutional space.

The quote from the manager's interview above clarified that to influence a child meant making her 'believe' in the staff, making her to 'go along' with the staff, not using authoritarian methods, 'convincing the child that the staff wants to help her'; make her believe that the staff is an 'oasis', a 'helper'. The interviewee repeated three times that she never lied to the girls. However, I observed that certain information was concealed from the residents. When I made a remark about this, the response was: *'It is in the best interest of the girls'*.

The notion of 'influence' was more generally used by different actors of control until it appeared in legal rhetoric. The new legislation concerning young people (1998) was entitled the "Juvenile Sanctions Act" (In Estonian: 'Alaealiste mõjutamisvahendite seadus' which includes the word 'influencing'—'mõjutamine'). In fact, the term is not new in the field of youth control. The 1980 Law of Commissions of Adolescent Affairs uses the same terminology in speaking about methods (measures) of influencing juveniles. However, earlier the most common term was re-education. In cases where a girl has problems with listening comprehension, or 'could not be influenced' because of the above-mentioned reasons ('inborn negative attitude' or 'having previous been under somebody's deeper influence'), there were sanctions and ways of punishment to get through to them. Hence, the same manager who was the biggest advocate for child-centred management sent a girl who regularly organised collective escapes into isolation where she started to break the walls of the room and ended up taken away by the police to the town jail.

In other words, according to the new rhetoric, using the notion 'influencing' was more appropriate than previous ways of speaking, but if a girl refused to subordinate to the influence, the method was applied as coercion.



*'Our girls have to understand that they have to change their ways of thinking and behaviour, they have to learn to discipline themselves. It can not happen without any coercion.'*

So, the main objective of the work of the staff, especially underlined by the management, was to make the girls co-operate with the staff. First this co-operation should take place voluntarily from the residents' part, but if they showed signs of rebellion, they were forced to co-operate.

I believe that there was a genuine will to change the institution into a more democratic place, but there were three major problems which interfered in the attempt to reach this goal. Firstly, the understanding of 'democracy' had various meanings in the minds of the different staff members and it was connected with other concepts. Moreover, it was differently interpreted by different actors. For instance, such notions as 'human rights' (including the 'rights of the child'), 'personal freedom' and 'privacy' were interpreted as opposite to previous Soviet concepts of being under the state control. If earlier it was the right of the state to control an individual and intervene into his/her personal private life, now these notions were understood as the right of an individual to keep personal secrets. But how does this accord with institutional control, without which the K. School could not function?

Secondly, there was an irrational expectation that the democratisation would take place by itself, that is, the other staff members and the residents were going to understand by themselves that now they had to think, behave and deal with issues and each other in a new way — a democratic way. There was a tendency to democratise the institution without open discussions of collective activity.

Finally; the managers were hoping to succeed in realising the principles of democracy by simultaneously holding on to their traditional power.

Because of such discords, contradictions and wishes to conform, the disharmony, the ideology of residential management was given new versions of interpretation and argumentation. Hence the rhetoric of change was switched to changes of rhetoric. The new rhetoric was continuously given new interpretations.

## **7. CONCLUSION: Transition, Exclusion and a Hypothetical Assumption**

In this last chapter I make some final notes and with this consolidate the information and knowledge I acquired in the K. School. I discuss the process of transition in Estonia with regard to the problems of childhood and residential management of troubled young people. I express some thoughts and doubts concerning social work as a helping profession in Estonia today. I discuss its role and function in the society with regard to the general expectations of both Estonian society and the state policy towards social work, as well as how these expectations influence the status of social work today and its possible development in the future. The last thoughts should be perceived as hypothetical assumptions, which result from the knowledge that was produced during the research process.

### **7.1. Transition: Rhetoric of Integration and the Process of Marginalization**

The transition process in Estonia as 'Westernisation' has a clearly visible impact on the K. School. The most relevant characteristics to this process, which I perceived during my fieldwork period in the institution, are the following.

The new values expressed in the institutional rhetoric are based on denial and the destruction of former values. This destruction happens mostly through a simple positioning of what is desired in opposition to what was before; through replacing the minus sign with the plus sign and vice versa.

The way in which people speak about their past shows a deep alienation from that past. Today they reconstruct their past as if they themselves were not participants in that life, but only passive

sufferers (see chapter 6.2.). This phenomenon is especially noticeable among the Estonian staff members. The Russian personnel is divided into those who identify themselves with the Soviet past and, as such, are free from alienation from that past, but instead have problems with finding their place in the current life of society — their attitude to the present is rather an active position of protest. The other group of Russian staff members do not agree with the past but are nevertheless pushed towards the first group because of traditional ways of categorising. As a result these people are alienated both from the past and from the present (see chapter 4.3.1.).

The adaptation of so-called 'Western' attributes to the institution begins with external manifestation of things. This includes the application of new vocabulary into the operation of the institution and a new rhetoric. However, the new words now in use have their very specific local meanings, which become clear when the new rhetoric is compared with the concrete activities. There is talk about human rights and the right of privacy, which receive their manifestations in ostensible forms. For instance, the management emphasises that the residents are guaranteed to have the right to privacy which means that they are allowed to have things of their own in the institution (clothes, toys, etc.), but at the same time the personnel routinely enter the bedrooms, even toilets, any time on a whim, read and censor the residents' personal letters, and publicly talk about their intimate problems.

In Bakhtinian terminology, this way of thinking can be explained so that the process starts with an adaptation of 'leading thoughts' into the attributes of the particular world the people wish to belong to (in the case of Estonia, it is the Western world), and the first meaning produced in the process is an 'individual' — local — meaning of the word, which is then compared to the so-called 'vocabulary meaning' of the word. The newer such terminology is the greater are the differences between the so-called 'local' and 'vocabulary' meanings. The relationship between the local and general (Western) meanings of terms can be quite loose and detached due to specific interpretations that are linked to local circumstances, interests and needs.

The adaptation of Western attributes happens not only on the verbal level. There are also other signs of sharing Western world val-



ues, and a similar adaptation process that begins on an external level can be perceived also, for instance, in the symbolic 'open gate' as a demonstration of the 'openness' of the institution that was discussed in chapter 3.1.2. The renovation of rooms in the institution also illustrates the notion well. There is a widespread fashion in Estonia to 'Euro-renoate' (euroremont) buildings, which means that high European standards are used: the outcome should be aesthetically pleasant, of high quality and good workmanship from the foundation to the finishing. However, in the K. School 'Euro-renovation' was not realised according to the immediate needs of the residents, but began with the repair of empty or rarely used rooms from the perspective of how they might be used in the future (see chapter 3). Moreover, the common space that the residents hardly used, such as the library, were renovated. The headmistress's nice and spacious office was not used for organising common staff meetings; however, the furniture and equipment seemed to be expressly suitable for such activities.

The application of Westernisation to the new type of management is also manifested first of all on the external level: the power of the headmistress, for instance, receives Western attributes in the form of the new and comfortable office which is removed far enough — behind two doors — from the rest of the actors in the institution (distance), as well as delegation of the executing power to lower levels of staff, which the head clearly puts in words: 'Let the school solve its problems by itself' (for more detail see in chapters 4.2.2., 6.2. and 6.3.).

All of the above-mentioned details tell a lot about the co-existence of something new but external, and something old and very 'Soviet'. Namely, the declared value of the human being is present here as abstraction and coexists with the rejection of actual human beings with their immediate needs. Human activity in general appears to be preparation for life in the future rather than here and now, which was very characteristic to the Soviet way of thinking.

I wrote about the gap between the new rhetoric<sup>26</sup> and activities in chapter 6. However, Kelly (1992: 206–7) points out that such a gap between the official rhetoric and the real institutional activity as a phenomenon is consequential to the nature of total institutions:

*"...the rhetorical imagery of welfare and benevolence and of professional expertise in achieving rhetorical aims was profoundly contradicted by the penal nature of the unit's architecture and the level of constraint, coercion and surveillance it imposed. Professionals could be seen to do one thing whilst calling it another."*

Hence, the question arises of whether it is only in concern to the special needs school that this gap exists. However, I do perceive some parallels with the Estonian society in general, which could be explained also as signs of transition. In this era of transition certain phenomena rooted in the former system are quite visible. It appears very simple to make declarations of reform offhand, without concerns about either the realisation of the notion or the actual meaning of the words. (Perhaps it is a specific expectation that using the right words will result in the right thing?) For example, if we compare the institutional rhetoric of 'child-centred approach' which, is derived from 'the best interest of the child', and its realisation in institutional operation with the Estonian concept of child protection and its realisation, we can notice many similarities. The same contradictions are apparent between the new rhetoric of Estonian child protection and child management and the ways of its implementation. The new rhetoric springs directly from Western values. In 1991, Estonia ratified the UN Convention on Children's Rights, and the Estonian Act on Child Protection (1992) was written under the influence of the Convention. It is a law that declares high human ideals, but largely if not only on a rhetorical (ideological) level. For example, the act declares in paragraph 8 that all children have "a right by birth to life, health, development, work<sup>27</sup> and welfare". But

<sup>26</sup> I use the term 'rhetoric' here as it is understood in the works of Barbara Kelly. She applies the term by analogy with verbal statement of ideology and as an opposite to practice; actual activity.

<sup>27</sup> This particularly is a totally meaningless 'right' and in direct conflict with the legislation on employment, in which the minimum age for registering as a job applicant is stated as 18 years.

where are the guarantees? How is it expressed in concrete state activity? Almost the only mechanism to guarantee this right is realised through forcing the parents to care about their children. If the parents do not meet the obligations, they may be punished by either being fined or by disfranchisement of their parental rights. Neither support nor services are provided to assist the parents and the family with bringing up their children successfully.

At the same time, there is reason to keep in mind that real activity produces changes in rhetoric, at least in general, rather than the other way round. There is not one Estonian politician who speaks about Estonian child welfare policy, but what we hear is its absence. I believe that even though this is not enough to solve the problem itself, it is a sign of the transition and a herald of changes to come.

## 7.2. Towards an Exclusive Society

The objective of the K. School's operation, as defined by the statute, are to create conditions for children who need special education to complete their compulsory education, as well as to bring them up in order to manage in the society, with the specific aim of resocialisation (The K. School Statute 1999)<sup>28</sup>.

As becomes evident in my observations (see chapter 5.2.5.), as well as the results of the study led by Kõrgesaar (1999: 41–42), special needs schools have trouble in reaching their educational aims. Ordinary school curricula are too difficult to implement in such circumstances, the special needs school pupils are often long way behind their age level in terms of their academic skills, and the special needs school teachers feel the time they have for preparation work

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<sup>28</sup> Here I refer to the new statute of the school in which the aim of resocialisation was added due to the fact that the previous statute was neither verified by the Ministry of Education, nor acknowledged by the management. In reality this means that from 1991 to 1999, also during my field-work period, the institution operated with no valid statute to regulate it. However, the educational aim was always emphasised as the most important part of the institutional activity from the official viewpoint, and resocialisation meant preparing the girls to lead an independent life in the society. In practice, this meant marrying a good man and settling down.



for teaching the children is insufficient. In other words, it is not possible for the academic education in the special needs schools to function the way basic education is organised today. Here it also becomes clear that the same attitudes as in other functions of the special needs schools, inherited from the past still prevail: it is not the child around whom the schooling process is organised, but he/she must be adapted to the existing norms and standards of education. However, even if the objectives of basic education could be reached and everyone who left the special needs school had satisfactorily completed their basic education, what would be different? Would basic education given in the special needs school give a real opportunity for these children to continue their studies in a secondary school? Hardly. For example, of 21 graduated residents in 1997 only 3 were planning to continue their studies in an evening secondary school. I do not know whether they succeeded in doing so. In the staff conversations the usual story is that the girls start to study, but drop out of school after a few months. I am well aware that those discussions are mostly pure speculation, and in order to gain truthful information about the future success of the girls in their studies a specific study should be conducted. However, what is important in this connection is the pessimistic and grim predictions of the staff members concerning this particular issue<sup>29</sup>.

In this light, the only aim schooling has in reality is exclusion. For instance, Goldson (1997: 20–22) sees schooling process first of all as an institution of exclusion and state control as its main objective. Qvortrup (1991: 27) stresses the active role of children schooling in process with regard to their input to the production of knowledge:

*"Children not only attend schools, but they are in fact co-producers of knowledge by investing their energy, intelligence and creativity. If it is true that knowledge is produced and accumulated in and by children (together with their teachers, of course), then we cannot go on saying that children's entrance into necessary activity is postponed in modern society. One could equally well argue that the integration of children into society is occurring earlier and earlier,*

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<sup>29</sup> After the enactment of the 1998 law, the residents were sent to the institution for no longer than one year. This meant that the educational aim of the schools were reduced to be even further nominal.

*since it no longer begins with their becoming part of the labour market but with school."*

If we agree with Ovortrup's notion, it should be nevertheless noted that the described teaching/learning as a process of producing new knowledge is not a general characteristic of schooling that extends to all schools everywhere. In a certain sense it is an ideal, which can perhaps be reached in some so-called Estonian elite schools, whose pupils are brought up for learning and have high intellectual capacity for academic education. More characteristic to the common school is the phenomenon of reproduction of the specific qualities of one's social class, which P. Willis (1977) most convincingly argues in his well-known work. With regard to the process and outcome of socialisation of working class young people in an ordinary school which is founded on middle class values it becomes clear that they do not adopt middle class values in the process of their studies, but their identity as part of the working class is further reinforced and confirmed.

The ordinary Estonian school system, which is oriented towards high academic knowledge, also produce as such school truancy by excluding those pupils who are not able or are not prepared for intense academic studies. The question of how the school produces school truancy is an extremely important question of school social work today in Estonia. School truancy appears to be a very important sign of the contemporary direction of Estonia towards an exclusive society. For example, the Council of European Project in Human Dignity and Social Exclusion (Duffy 1998: 99–119) tells of the risks of exclusion concerning education in post-Communist countries. In the circumstances of a rapid social stratification process after the restoration of independence, the process of the intensive marginalization of a large part of the society can be perceived in the increasing rate of school truancy.

Regarding compulsory education and school attendance, there appears to be three main reasons that make it extremely important that children go to school. First, human beings are not socially conscious innately; they do not behave instinctively according to a pre-determined social structure similar to the animal world, but become part of the human society in the process of socialisation. Secondly,

children are dependent by status. I agree with Gittins (1998: 74), when she writes:

*"What is good for children? Who should decide? Who is responsible for their well-being in all its senses: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual? These are arguably the core questions relating to the problem of children's dependencies. They are now articulated overwhelmingly in terms of one universal child, one universal childhood. What is inherent in this issue, however, is the concept of protection. An individual or group is, for one reason or another, deemed to be responsible for the protection of a dependent child. The duration and character of such dependency, which can be seen more logically as a cluster of different dependencies (physical, emotional, economic, legal), vary according to historical period, state legislation, parent-household, and individual circumstances. The notion of protection is premised by definition on a clear power differential between protector and protected. Paternalism is implicit in such a relationship. Paternalism can be benevolent, like a benevolent dictatorship, but it also has the potential for malevolence and harm, as do dictatorships. When apparent benevolence is the order of the day in relation to the protection of children by parents, nobody intervenes. It is when the relationship becomes malevolent, violent, destructive that crisis occurs in terms of responsibility and ownership of children. It is important to remember, however, that there is no universal definition of cruelty. ..."* (Original emphasis).

Thirdly, the controlling function of the school in addition to its aim of socialisation seems to be of particular importance in the Estonian society, where the process of quick stratification is a new phenomenon unknown during the last fifty years of the Soviet era. This novelty means first of all that people have had not enough time to adapt to the new situation; especially if we take into account the totally different expectations people had of the social activity in the previous circumstances of the Soviet state paternalism. In this new situation the most desired human characteristics are initiative, independent thinking and courage; however, most of the Estonian people went through their own primary socialisation process during the Soviet era when all these qualities were punishable and therefore rooted out. As a consequence, a large part of people still expect the



state to care about them, make decisions for them, and are not able to do much for their own well-being. This resignation to waiting for something to happen results in a gradual slipping outside of and removal from participation in common social life. These people create their own social life, to which different types of retreatism (in Mertonian understanding of this term) are characteristic, such as alcohol and drug addiction, suicide, and mental health problems and disability. The children of such families have the potential of being mediators between the society and their socially excluded parents through education. This great potential for development of social solidarity between different groups of society is not recognised, nor utilised in today's Estonia. All of the above-mentioned problems, as well as opportunities, seem to be issues for school social work to deal with.

To return to the aims of the K. School it is obvious that the current situation with the second official aim of the special needs schools — vocational training — is in a similar position as the first one (schooling). In the former (Soviet) time, the school provided the children with a profession and real opportunities for putting it into use, that is, to work. This aim is lost: nobody believes that there are realistic opportunities for the residents to be equal job-seekers in the labour market. Both activities (schooling and vocational training) have one true aim — to divert children from the activities that are conceived as dangerous; loitering on the streets, making trouble, using drugs and alcohol, stealing and risking to be taken advantage of and abused. To be brief: the aim is to isolate them. However, the vocational training could be a good basis for development of occupational therapy, which is — obviously-greatly needed in institutions like the K. School is (see, for instance, Leino 2001, Kielhofner 1997 in Tahk 1999: 9–19, etc.).

The next question is how the aim of resocialisation, or reformation of the residents' personality, is reached? First of all, let us take a glance of what kind of vocabulary is used in discussing this topic. After the phrases 'child-centred approach' and 'best interest of the child' were introduced, the content of work with the child was expressed in terms such as 'influencing' and 'shaping'. The staff refused to use words from the former period, such as 're-education' (*ümberkasvatamine*) or 'subordination' (*allutama*). However, if we

analyse the usage of the new terms, it is easily detected that there are signs of them having identical meanings with the previous ones. It is difficult to understand the distinction between the terms 'influencing' and 'subordination', because the activity behind them is identical: the resident should behave themselves, do or be as they are told to by the staff (see chapter 5). One of the managers even uses the metaphor 'wax' when talking about a child as mouldable material with which a pedagogue has to work (similar attitudes can be found in the writings of Cohen 1985, Donzelot 1980, Kelly 1992, etc.). Such an attitude towards the residents as objects of work is very characteristic in the K. School (see also chapter 4).

The above-mentioned could be explained by indifference/ignorance between people that I observed and experienced working on the field. Most clearly this indifference is expressed through the expectations people have of each other without any discussion of the basis of those expectations. The staff has very certain images of what people are and what they are supposed to do, but these images were never discussed. As it was described in chapter 4.2.2., the management expects that middle level staff shares their life with the residents. The notion that the staff members figure it out themselves what are their tasks and how they work was tied to this expectation. I was not an exception from this general phenomenon of expectations. I had my own irrational expectations towards the different levels of the staff, the residents, and myself. One particular issue was that I attempted to guess what those people expected of me without actually asking them. I assumed that the management expected high pedagogical professionalism from me. I thought I had to demonstrate how it was possible to deal with the residents successfully, and assigned this task to myself. Moreover, I never discussed the aim of my research, nor my guess-work expectations of other people with them. I was both left alone with my problems and actively chose not to speak about such issues. I saw it as unimportant, and that in general there is no time for anyone to actually discuss communication because there are much more important tasks to do than attempt at open and direct communication with each other. This is what I call 'indifference', which is in my opinion tied to the general process of rising individualism.

In the first chapter I took an example from the book edited by Lauristin and Vihalemm, which attempts to describe the processes in Estonian society to show how the process of 'Westernisation' run its course. Individualism as the basic quality of Estonians is pointed out as the foundation for why they 'belong' to the Western world (Lauristin 1997). There are two different phenomena which could be seen as similar to each other: 'individualism' and 'being single' in an atomised society. Both of them means separation from others and a certain opposition of the individual to the collective (society). I refrain from going very deep into the analysis of what the two notions have in common and what differentiates them, but what I see as the most significant point here is that Western individualism is developed on the basis of a community (naturally developed informal relations between people), whereas the other builds on the basis of violent destruction of such communal systems. With this I want to make the point that being separate from others is also a result of the Soviet order. This type of individualism is based on separation of people, suspicion, distrust and indifference between them.

However, in both cases the result is quite similar: they both promote the development of exclusive society. Young (1999: 6-7) describes the Western process with regard to the development of social control in modernity and late modernity "*as a movement from inclusive to an exclusive society*". Exclusive society develops together with the rise of individualism and tolerance towards pluralism and multiculturalism. Inclusive society is based on assimilation. Modernity does not tolerate differences and the tendency is to change differences to similarity, while in late-modernity plurality and multiculturalism, namely, difference, becomes acceptable.

The Soviet system was also assimilative, but the inclusion happened violently, the values were constructed artificially by one group of interests and forced on to the society, which was only possible to realise through strong control mechanisms. In the first chapter I wrote about the function of these control mechanisms in the late Soviet time. When this forced assimilation and control disappeared, the society fell to pieces. In this case we cannot speak about 'tolerance', because tolerance means acceptance of otherness. Here the result is indifference. Indifference towards plurality and otherness from a distance appears similar to tolerance, but in a situation



of wild competition, as it is today in Estonia, the outcome is a speedy exclusion of everyone who does not meet the quite limited standards of the society. In this situation, society in general is not interested in the potential integration of 'others'.

With concern to the special needs school residents it seems to be that the society is not ready to include them. Otherwise there would be at least something visible that spoke for this acceptance. The previously-mentioned rehabilitation group for the graduated residents of the K. School reinforces the aim of exclusion. The state attitude towards the special needs schools is expressed in the decisions made on what the state invests into managing troubled children. The contribution is precisely as much as is needed for keeping troubled children and young people in isolation.

K. is a place of isolation; moreover, it is isolation without a single thought about the outcome; what is going to happen to those young people who leave it and return to the society. As I learned during my fieldwork period, the only hope for them is that during this temporary isolation from 'bad environment' their 'stormy puberty' would be over and done with, the criminal friends will disappear, a miracle happens to the violent parents and they will change, and during the time when it is prohibited for the girls to drink and abuse drugs they will learn to cope without them. If the upbringing succeeds in adding the opportunity to find a good husband after the school is over, the number of survivors slightly grows. The only problem here is what will happen if these things do not come true?

Thus, let us look at the role of the staff in the process of isolation. The staff is there to solve the problem of how to keep the residents in isolation. Their reward, however, is another manifestation of the attitudes of the society (state). I hate to make positive comparisons with the Soviet time, but in this case the Soviet rhetoric of the value of children and the real investment in them should be taken as an example of the opposite. I naturally speak about the formal exponents, which were expressed in

- relatively high salary (the salary of a special needs school staff member was almost twice as high as other school teachers);
- other perks (accommodation, vacation, health care);
- high professional qualification;

- relatively large financial investment in the operation of the schools.

One teacher characterised the differences with the words: "*We were the first, but now we are the last [among teachers].*"

It seems that the staff is left with a very difficult problem to solve, a problem, which has its inbuilt contradictions. They have to prepare young people to be (re)socialised into a society which is not ready to integrate (to accept) them. This work is prescribed to failure in principle. It is not surprising that the staff has multiple health problems and burn-out symptoms. Moreover, they are not only left alone with their problems, but they also are step by step pushed in the direction of marginalization. In this, they are in a situation which is similar to that of social workers.

### 7.3. The Contradictions of Social Work as a Helping Profession in Transition Time Estonia

The attentive reader may have noticed long ago that in this work I am mostly interested in the K. School staff's social activity. I was amazed myself how I was constantly turned to observing how the staff members acted, what they did and said, and how they participated in the production of residential management, residents, and themselves. This production process did have other participants, but the 'main role' belonged to the staff. The reason of my interest was also connected with what I expressed in the very end of the previous sub-chapter: the staff acts similarly to social workers in today's Estonia; they perform helping work with the residents as social workers do with their clients. In Estonia today social work equals helping work with clients.

The following discussion should be considered a hypothetical assumption that the work of the K. School staff is similar to social work and has the effects I perceived on the activities of the K. School. On the one hand, the hypothesis summarised the results of the research; and on the other hand, it offers some outlooks for the future investigations in the field of social work research.

First, the contemporary Estonian society gives such a task to the special needs school staff (social work) which consists of deep contradictions: the task to integrate people (residents or social work clients) who have dropped out and marginalized into a society that is not ready to accept, integrate, and include them. The work profile is a circle: from beyond the outline, the social worker pulls the client into the society which discharges him/her out time and time again. What is the benefit of such work? The client's problem is not solved, because it is impossible for an individual to solve a problem which is produced by the system. The society continues to produce marginalization (exclusion), because there is nobody to deal with problem of structural marginalization. The social worker burns out, because his/her work has no permanent results. In brief, there are no winners. Naturally we can imagine that somewhere there operates a genius of social work who is capable of solving the clients' problems, but no profession at large can hope to resort to a few superhuman workers.

Secondly, client social work (helping individuals) has its negative outcomes not only for the client, but also for the society in general, because of its stigmatising function. To be a client of social work is an unpleasant role. It means affirmation of marginality. In a word, social work produces its clients as long as it deals with clients as bearers of troubles. As a result of this process the society will be even more divided into those who are inside and to those who are excluded.

Thirdly, the production of clients takes place because of the power of a social worker's to which he/she is licensed. Social worker is a license-holder of norms, who has the right to his/her own opinion and definitions of issues accordingly. The license and certainty in one's own opinion also provides the certainty and right to work on the client as on an object.

If social problems and troubled people are a product of collective activity, then the solving of such problems and helping such people should also be collective activity. Working in collaboration with the system social work would have the potential to help in developing an integrative society, in developing social solidarity, which seems to be especially needed in a society such as the Estonian one where the



identity as an independent nation is built up as an opposition to foreign power because of historical fate.

#### 7.4. In Place of Epilogue

I wish to make it clear to the reader that I am aware this writing is more critical than I intended it to be. The object of study — residential management of adolescent girls — is an extremely heavy topic. I wanted to take a critical approach to it, and it is impossible not to be critical towards the processes and social activities that take place in the institution, but my criticism is not directed at people who have difficulties with and do a hard and thankless work trying their best to solve problems in this field. If it did not succeed, it is because of my lack of skill to convey my thoughts. I, as a researcher, was also 'in transition' during this research process. My transition is tied with research as a learning process. Something I have understood, but there are things I am just not ready for yet, I am only learning.

The whole research process was long and hard from the very beginning, and especially during the time between leaving the field and finishing the writing. All this time I felt I had to hurry. I felt I had to find some way of helping to solve the problem at the K. School. I felt the people — both the residents and staff members — were expecting me to finish the analysis and provide them with answers. Simultaneously I felt I couldn't offer anything that could help them. First of all I thought I couldn't offer anything to the staff that would be acceptable for them. The time went by and I was not ready with my analysis and writing, which made me very anxious.

I was full of doubts and the more I wanted to hurry, the slower my work progressed. After years I finished writing the manuscript the content of which, and the way of my writing, I could accept. Now a new task appeared ahead of me: I had to return to the institution and speak to the people about my findings. I knew that if I wanted to be true to the results of my research, if I really believed that the biggest problem of our society was lack of trust and rejection of direct and straight communication between people, then I have to be the first one to start with such communication. But I

feared at least three things. First, I feared that the other side, that is, the staff would be not interested in my findings due to the long time that had lapsed between my stay in the institution and now ('during these five years, things have changed and they will think all my findings are obsolete, they have no use for them any longer with their present problems'). Secondly, I feared I would not be allowed to meet the whole staff, but only the managers; and thirdly, I feared of being ignored by the listeners. I imagined this meeting to be similar to my first meeting at K., when I sat among my future colleagues and nobody introduced me to others. Now the colleagues would remember me, but they would hardly show any interest towards the results of my study. I remembered the words of one staff member *'Who asked you to keep it in front of our faces?'* when I explained my aim to be a mirror. I imagined a situation in which most of the people shun away from listening something critical, are scared to recognise themselves.

After hesitating for a long time I wrote a letter. I began my letter with the address: "Dear co-operation partners at K. Special Needs School; Managers, Educators and Teachers". I addressed all of them hoping that the information about my wish to meet and to speak about the results of study will reach all of them. In this letter I only wrote about my wish to present them my manuscript upon finishing it. I explained shortly the processes concerning with analysing the data, my doubts and about my wish to discuss together some of my findings before the thesis will be published. I promised to add their opinion into this last epilogue part of my work. Whereas the letter was written without addressing it to anybody specifically by name, on the envelope I wrote the name of the headmistress. I thought that if there is no name at all, nobody will take the responsibility to reply to me.

I received a very quick e-mail answer. It was written by the headmistress, and in it she pointed out how many changes had happened during those five years after my leaving the field. She expressed her doubts of the topicality of my data, which would by now have become outdated.

However, I was invited to K. the following week. As I suspected, only three managerial staff members met with me. During the meeting I explained why I had asked to come, and introduced them

the main findings of my analysis; adding that what I had studies were social activities that do not go through such rapid changes as actual everyday problems of institutions can do.

We discussed some my interpretations of the notions of the relationships between different staff levels. I told about my finding of irrational expectations and the lack of direct communication between people. This topic made them think, but I did not receive any argumentation, nor agreement.

Then I asked what they thought about the passive nature of the Russian staff members' work with the residents. I was responded with the general opinion was that such working style is a personality issue, and passivity is not characteristic of all Russian staff. Verbal participation is also participation. However, the opinion familiar from my fieldwork period that there should be a separate institution for Russian girls was repeated.

However, the staff members were not so much interested in my findings, but more in telling about the changes that had taken place after I left the institution. Now the biggest problem was the residents' drug addiction. About 60% of residents had severe problems with drugs. At the same time, there was no treatment for addicted girls at all due to the lack of finances and other resources.

The situation had become more difficult: the changes in legislation; the expectations towards institutions like the K. School had taken a turn towards being even more evidently isolative, which was expressed in the emphasis on the formal educative aim of the institution. The potential to change the total institution to an open school where troubled young people could receive help, love, and hope for the future was gone. The gate was still open during the day, just as before. The empty building in the middle of the village was still there, but the dog was gone. It seems he grew tired of guarding of empty building and giving the newcomer a fright.

Upon leaving the main building of the institution after this last meeting I bumped into one of my former colleagues. She smiled and ask me if I was coming to work there again. She did not know about my letter. Her smile and warm handshake gave me the assurance. I hope everything will be OK.



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## PHOTOS



1. The Main Building



2. The View from the Dormitory





3. The Empty Building



4. The Stadium



5. and 6. The Corridors of the Dormitory



7. and 8. The Village's Blocks of Flats



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"The research is a very interesting and rich ethnography of a residential institution for troublesome girls in Estonia in the late 1990s. Judit Strömpl has collected her data by working as an educator in the K. school for four months in 1997 participating its daily activities, observing and discussing with and/or interviewing staff, managers and residents of the institution. The author's ambitious aim is to bring a new approach to the Estonian professional and scientific discourse on troublesome children and young people by analysing the system, its everyday operation, ideology, and rhetoric and not the individualised reasons for the problems of young people. This institutional ethnography is also used as a case to analyse Estonian transition-time society and especially the organisation and ideology of managing its problems with troublesome young people. Especially for a foreign reader this makes the book even more interesting and shows the author's cultural sensitivity."

**Professor Marjo Kuronen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland.**

"The thesis is extremely well written. ... I very much enjoyed reading the thesis and learnt a lot from doing so. ... The ethnographic fieldwork on which the book draws was well carried out and clearly documented. The thesis has a nice reflective quality. ... The descriptions and findings will be of substantial interest to a wide audience. The thesis will make a considerable contribution to the academic literature."

**Dr. Amanda Coffey, Cardiff University, UK.**